THE DRAMA OF PREACHING

PARTICIPATING IN THE WORK OF GOD IN THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Purpose and Thesis of this Study 4
1.3 Necessity of this Study 5
1.4 Plan of this Study 5
1.5 Presuppositions and Theological Point of View 6

Chapter 2: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion: The Redemptive-Historical Preaching Debates Yesterday and Today
2.1 Introduction 7
2.2 Interest in Redemptive-Historical Preaching in the Netherlands 7
2.3 Interest in Redemptive-Historical Preaching Outside the Netherlands 14
2.4 Homiletics in the Context of Other Theological Disciplines 21
2.5 The Newness of Redemptive-Historical Preaching 23
2.6 Summary: The Discussion Continues 29

Chapter 3: The Drama of Redemption and Redemptive-Historical Preaching
3.1 Introduction 31
3.2 Defining the Drama of Redemption 32
3.3 The Drama of Scripture 38
3.4 Historical Use of the Drama Metaphor 52
3.5 Redemptive Historical Preaching and the Drama of Redemption 62
3.6 Cautions and Conclusion 66

Chapter 4: Hebrews 11 and the Drama of Redemptive-Historical Preaching: A Case Study
4.1 Introduction 71
4.2 Various Approaches to Hebrews 11 72
4.3 Translation Trajectories of Hebrews 11:1-2 74
4.4 The Structure of Hebrews 11 80
4.5 What the People of Old Received 83
4.6 Hebrews 12:1-2 84
4.7 The Drama of Christ in the Hall of Faith 88
4.8 Summary and Conclusion (Hebrews 11:32-40) 119

Chapter 5: Application or Imitation? Reconsidering the Sine Qua Non of Preaching
5.1 Introduction 122
5.2 The Importance of Application 123
5.3 Historical Development of the Idea of Application 126
5.4 Biblical Perspective of Application and Imitation 130
5.5 Imitating the Saints: A Case Study in Hebrews 11 143
5.6 Crossing the Bridge of History 156
5.7 Cautions and Conclusion 159

Chapter 6: Preaching the Christ-Centered Drama of Redemption in the Postmodern Scene
   6.1 Introduction 161
   6.2 Postmodernism and the Problem of History 162
   6.3 Preaching into the Historical Vacuum 169
   6.4 Is There an Author Behind This Text? 174
   6.5 Preaching the Author’s Message 179
   6.6 Postmodernism and the Challenge of Morality 184
   6.7 Preaching the Meaning of Texts and the Meaning of Life 186
   6.8 Summary, Cautions, and Conclusion 193

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion 198

Samenvatting 204

Bibliography 210
Acknowledgments

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Eric B. Watkins
For the Church
Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Preaching is dramatic. Through it God both speaks and acts. In a manner of speaking, God *preached* the world into existence.¹ By this spoken word, he called into being that which formerly did not exist. By this same spoken word, God not only upholds all things (Hebrews 1:3); in particular, he redeems and re-creates humanity into his own image through the preaching of the gospel.² Preaching, thus, is a part of God’s unfolding drama of redemption in which he speaks and acts out his purposes in history from creation to consummation. From one generation to the next, to bear the responsibility of preaching God’s word is both a remarkable privilege, and at the same time a tremendous challenge. This is increasingly true in the context of postmodernism and its struggles to retain confidence in history, authority, and morality—losses which come with profound consequences for preaching. Yet these challenges are not altogether new, nor are they insurmountable.

Many of the time-tested Christian confessions hold preaching in high regard. For example, the Second Helvetic Confession, one of the loftier expressions of preaching says that preaching, when faithfully performed is nothing less than the word of God.³ According to this confession, when preachers faithfully preach God’s word—*God himself is speaking and acting*. Accordingly, preaching has always been at the heart of the church. However, where theological matters are important, they are frequently surrounded by clouds of controversy. This is certainly true of preaching. A working definition of preaching might be as follows: preaching is rightly proclaiming the word of God in such a way as to declare clearly and authoritatively what man is to believe concerning God, as well as the duty God requires of man.⁴ Other nuanced definitions for preaching have varied in homiletic reflection over the centuries.⁵ This variety underscores

¹ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 2 Heidelberg Catechism 27-28. Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism 88. 3 Second Helvetic Confession article 1. ⁴ This working definition is based upon 2 Timothy 2:15 and WSC Q/A 3. ⁵ Perhaps most recognizable in our day is the definition of preaching as the explication and application of God’s word. A simple definition, however, is neither given by Scripture nor easily determined from church history. See, for instance, Dargan’s recognition of the difficulty in pinpointing the birth of Christian preaching in definitive and paradigmatic form. In his view, the apostolic model is the “regulative basis for Christian preaching at all times.” Edwin Dargan, *A History of Preaching, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 25. Ronald Wallace takes the view that “The earliest Christian preaching took the form of a simple conversational, practical, and pastoral homily, based
both the importance and the complexity of preaching. Often, these complexities have led to
debates from which have come both sweet and bitter fruit. One particular debate from the last
century seems to have found something of a rebirth in recent hermeneutic and homiletic
discussions. It is what we shall refer to as the “redemptive-historical”\textsuperscript{6} preaching debate.

In the years circa the 1930’s in the Netherlands, this particular debate ensued over
hermeneutic and homiletic questions, and would have lasting effects upon many churches inside
and outside the Netherlands. The RH debate centered upon questions of how the Bible ought to
be preached and thus properly connected to the people of God today, particularly from Old
Testament narrative texts. Chief among those questions was how the person and work of Jesus
Christ ought to be preached from Old Testament narratives; and equally, the question of making
legitimate application from the same Old Testament narratives. This nuanced debate wrestled
over the question of application—or what was more precisely referred to as exemplaristic\textsuperscript{7}
application that reduced biblical characters to moral examples in abstraction from the person
and work of Christ. Both the supporters of the RH approach and those labeled as exemplaristic
generally agreed on the importance of preaching Christ as the center of Scripture (though
nuances abounded on each side). Key to the debate, however, was to what extent Old Testament
characters could serve an exemplary function? The RH side pushed back strongly, arguing that
what often occurred in preaching was a violation of the intention of the biblical text, which, in
their view, was to display the redemptive work of God in history. More on this will be
developed in chapter five, but simply put, the priority of respecting a historical text for where it
stood in the plot line of history lay at the heart of the RH side of the debate. Those on the other
side appreciated this concern, but responded quite defensively that the RH advocates were
coming close to creating a novel approach to preaching—one that over-emphasized history to the
point of excluding the exemplaristic contribution of biblical characters.

\textsuperscript{6}This is the English translation of the Dutch heils\textsuperscript{historisch}. Hereafter, RH.

\textsuperscript{7}B. Holwerda is credited with coining this term when he labeled a particularly moralistic strain of preaching
“exemplaristic” (exemplarisch in Dutch). B. Holwerda, Gereformeerd mannenblad, XVIII, (1940): 27. See also
his “De heils\textsuperscript{historie in de prediking” in Begonnen hebbende van Mozes (D.H. Littooij: Terneuzen, 1953), available
in English at http://www.spindelworks.com/library/holwerda/holwerda.htm. See also the discussion in Sidney
Though numerous biblical texts were focused on during this debate, a text that received considerable attention from both sides was Hebrews 11. This was likely due to the recognition that a homiletic approach to the Old Testament, in order for it to be deemed biblically viable, needed to be consistent with the way in which the New Testament both hermeneutically and homiletically utilizes the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews, and Hebrews 11 in particular, was a virtual epicenter of both—inspired hermeneutic and inspired homiletic. Though each side of the RH debate sought to be ‘biblical’ in its approach to preaching, it would be an understatement to say that a consensus was not reached. In some areas, the preaching debates that began in the 1930’s would make progress and come to clearer expression in the decades that followed. Regrettably, however, there were other areas of the debate that never reached a mature conclusion, including the particular issues related to preaching from the hall of faith found in Hebrews 11, and perhaps more precisely, the issue of homiletic application. This problem remains central to current discussions of RH preaching.

Fast-forward numerous decades, and we see an eventual decline in Dutch materials related to this debate in the Netherlands. This is likely due to the long shadow of World War II, internal struggles within the churches, and the changing theological scene in the Netherlands and beyond. In 1988, C. Trimp, at that time professor of Homiletics at the Theologische Universiteit Kampen in the Netherlands, made a sincere plea for further reflection and development on both the hermeneutical and homiletical side of the debate. It could be said that today, while the echo of that debate is heard in many churches both inside and outside of the Netherlands, there is still a great need for the church to wrestle not only with the questions of the past, but questions of the

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8 This preaching debate was part of a significant struggle within the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, also known as the GKN. The issues were significant enough that in 1944, another denomination was formed Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt), also known as the GKv. It would be far too simplistic, however, to reduce the reason for the new denomination to the preaching debate. It was much more comprehensive than that. For two accounts of this struggle in English, see A. Van Reest, Schilder’s Struggle for the Unity of the Church, trans. Theodore Plantinga, (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1990) and D. Van Dijk, My Path to Liberation, trans. Theodore Plantinga, (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 2004). Both works are translations of Dutch volumes.

9 C. Trimp, Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking: Hervatting van een onvoltooid gesprek (Kampen: Van Den Berg, 1988). This book was translated into English in 1996 under the title Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion, trans. Nelson Kloosterman (Dyer: Mid-America Seminary, 1996). The book not only gives a helpful summary of key aspects of the debate, but also pleads for the revisiting of some of the questions that remain unanswered. This dissertation owes part of its motivation to Trimp’s volume, as well as the way in which the current climate of homiletics, particularly in North American churches and seminaries, seems to be repeating many of the same steps of the RH debates that took place in the Netherlands.
future, particularly as they relate to the influences of postmodernism upon the church and its preaching. The homiletic community is in need of additional conversation partners, nuanced reflection, and contemporary translation of some of the older questions and concerns.\footnote{A point that is affirmed by Arie Baars, “Heilshistorische prediking in deze tijd” (1) & (2) \textit{Nader Bekeken}, 18 no. 1, (January, 2011): 10-15.}

Still, we are left wondering if Trimp’s request for a furthering of the conversation remains unanswered. In a variety of ways, his request for advancing the worthwhile aspects of the discussion about RH hermeneutics and preaching is being responded to, both inside the Netherlands and outside of it. One indirectly related form of advancement may be seen in the “drama of redemption”\footnote{This term shall be used throughout the dissertation, and is a synthesis of terms/ideas taken from several authors. See below for further details. Hereafter “DR.”} paradigm, which, while not being explicitly a rehearsal of the same questions from the earlier debate, is none-the-less remarkably similar in many of its concerns. In short, the DR paradigm views the Bible as a revealing unified, redemptive drama in which God is not simply the author but the main actor. At the same time, he is not alone; he has granted the church a scripted role that she must learn to faithfully perform (improvise) on the world stage—what Calvin called the “theatre of God’s glory.”\footnote{John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.2.} In our understanding, the DR paradigm moves beyond the RH model, while bearing a particular concern for the need to communicate the substance of the biblical message in ways that we will suggest may be helpful for preaching in a postmodern age.

1.2 Purpose and Thesis of this Study

The purpose of this dissertation will be to suggest the ways in which the DR paradigm may help to advance the RH preaching debate beyond some of the earlier obstacles and subsequent caricatures. In particular, our thesis is that a wedding of the RH and DR ideas may help overcome the false dilemma between preaching that is focused on the work of Christ revealed in redemptive history, and preaching that is focused on homiletic application. Thus, a union between the RH and DR paradigms could potentially overcome this regrettable dilemma, and create a faithful, fresh, and fruitful approach to preaching the gospel in a postmodern age.
1.3 Necessity of this Study

Literary contributions to the discussion of how to interpret and apply the Scripture are as old as the canon itself. Various homiletic approaches have developed alongside these discussions in an attempt to answer the questions of the day, and contemporary questions both echo and replace older ones. It is our conviction that revisiting an old discussion that had a strong emphasis on the importance of history (RH), and building upon it with a newer one that embodies a fresh approach to the question of homiletic application (DR), will hopefully address important contemporary homiletic questions while enhancing confidence and effectiveness in preaching. Our hope, in the end, is that this dissertation will address these issues in a way that is helpful to the church, and faithful to the one who continues to speak and act through the ministry of his inspired word.

1.4 Plan of this Study

Having introduced the purpose, necessity and plan of this study in chapter one, we will next survey the current status of the redemptive-historical preaching debates, bridging the gap from the past to the present in chapter two and thus showing the continuing relevance of the RH preaching debate. Chapter three will more fully introduce the DR paradigm, as well as the particular ways in which it can be employed as an enhancement beyond the RH paradigm and its obstacles. It will also address possible objections to the proposed synthesis. In chapters four and five, we will look specifically at Hebrews 11 as an exegetical case study in synthesizing the DNA of the RH and DR paradigms. Chapter four, in particular, will emphasize the Christ-centered nature of Hebrews 11 and its hermeneutical implications for preaching. Chapter five will focus on the important homiletic question of the application of Hebrews 11, with particular sensitivity to the idea of imitating the saints listed in that chapter. In chapter six we will apply our homiletic proposal particularly to the concern of preaching in a postmodern context and its sophisticated struggles with history, authority, and morality. Lastly, our summary and conclusion (chapter seven) will tie the various threads together, respond to potential objections, and make an earnest plea to recognize both the strengths and the weaknesses of both the RH and DR paradigms, thus forging from the two a nuanced homiletic method to be faithfully improvised in the drama of preaching.
1.5 Presuppositions and Theological Point of View

As with all dissertations, so also is this one influenced by the author’s presuppositions and theological point of view. Thus, rather than let the reader try to discern these between the lines, it may be helpful to state them here. This dissertation is written from a theological point of view that might be described as protestant, evangelical, and confessionally Reformed. That is to say, the author adheres to orthodox, protestant creeds and confessions, and in particular, has taken ordination vows as a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in which the Westminster Confession and Catechisms are the theological standards. Along with these the author also affirms the substance of the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dordt). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the author presupposes the unity, integrity and authority of Scripture, and its abiding relevance for the church and world today.
Chapter Two
Continuing an Unfinished Discussion:
The Redemptive-Historical Preaching Debates Yesterday and Today

2.1 Introduction

What has become of redemptive-historical RH preaching? Did Trimp’s plea for a reconsideration of some of the important questions from the earlier debate go unanswered?13 Arie Baars puts it well by asking, “Has RH preaching gone out with the tide?”14 In this chapter we shall consider the current climate of interest in RH preaching, both inside and outside the Netherlands. We will suggest that interest in RH preaching has waned in the Netherlands since the earlier debates, and we will consider some of the reasons why this is the case. We shall then look at the way in which there appears to be a surge of interest in RH preaching (and matters related to it) outside the Netherlands. Related to this second point, we will demonstrate that the interest in RH preaching is not limited simply to preaching per se, but extends to other theological branches, such as hermeneutics, and systematic and historical theology.

2.2 Interest in Redemptive-Historical Preaching in the Netherlands

It is fair to say that the level of interest in RH preaching in the Netherlands (the so-called ‘birthplace’ of the movement) has waned considerably since the earlier decades of its inception. Evidence for this is found not only in Trimp’s attempt to revive the discussion, but also in the academic material that has been published on preaching in recent decades.15 This is not to say that there is no interest in RH preaching, for in fact the opposite is the case. There are currently both academic and popular attempts to continue discussions related to RH preaching; however, in the contexts where these efforts continue, there has clearly been development from the older

13 Trimp’s effort to continue the discussion, at least particular nuances of it, are best expressed in one of his more popular homiletic works, Klank en weerklank: Door prediking tot geloofservaring. (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1989). Note that this book comes three years after his original plea in Heilsbeschikking en prediking: Herleving van een onvoltoooid gesprek (Kampen, Van Den Berg, 1986).
expressions of RH preaching to what it is now. This is most immediately seen in the work of Trimp’s successor, Kees (C.J.) de Ruijter and his numerous homiletic publications. The most recent of which, *Horen naar de Stem van God*, is an attempt to address several of the issues Trimp raised in the twilight of his career, such as the place of the Trinity in homiletic reflection and, perhaps more importantly, the idea of focusing on the immediate needs and situation of the hearer in preaching.\(^\text{16}\)

Further attempts to not only revitalize, but also advance the discussion in the Netherlands can be seen in recent PhD dissertations. Kees van Dusseldorp, for instance, has developed a homiletic approach that weaves together certain threads of the RH preaching paradigm with current trends in narrative theology.\(^\text{17}\) Additionally, Jos Douma’s 2008 dissertation, *Veni Creator Spiritus* develops and advances some of Trimp’s homiletic concerns, with particular emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit (an attempt to correct a perceived over-emphasis on Christology at the expense of pneumatology), as well as giving additional reflection to the role of the hearer in preaching.\(^\text{18}\) Still, there is a sense in which many in the Netherlands who are familiar with the early debate and its representatives would see the RH paradigm as being somewhat *oudewets* (old-fashioned), and would respectfully relegate it to the well-respected but virtually untouched trophy case of the past. We would like to now consider a few reasons why that may have become the case, as doing so will help us appreciate not only why interest in RH preaching may have waned in the Netherlands, but also why it may also be finding traction in other places for largely different reasons.

In order to appreciate the rise and fall of RH preaching in the Netherlands, it needs to be seen in its historical and ecclesiastical context. To a large extent, developments in RH preaching were embodied particularly in one, modest sized denomination, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Liberated (hereafter GKv). This denomination was born in the context of a difficult

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\(^{16}\) Kees (C.J.) de Ruijter, *Horen naar de Stem van God: Theologie en methode van de preke* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2013). See especially chapter 3 on the role of the Trinity in preaching. De Ruijter’s views about preaching, especially as he attempts to address Trimp’s concern to give more adequate attention to the needs of the hearer, have not gone unchallenged, even by those within the RH tradition. See J. Douma’s interaction in *Hoe gaan wij verder? Ontwikkelingen in de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* (Kampen: Kok, 2001), 84-88. Douma is reacting particularly to an earlier homiletic work that focused greater attention on the hearer. Cf. C. J. de Ruijter, *Preken en horen* (Kampen: Kok, 1998).

\(^{17}\) Kees van Dusseldorp, *Preken tussen de verhalen: Een homiletische doordening van narrativiteit* (Kampen, Kok, 2012).

\(^{18}\) Jos Douma, *Veni Creator Spiritus: De meditatie en het preekproces*, (Kampen, Kok, 2000). See pg. 53 in particular for his clear sense of carrying the mantle of Trimp’s concerns.
ecclesiastical controversy and the long, dark shadow of a world war. The new denomination began in 1944 as an offshoot of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (hereafter GKN). One of its foremost leaders was Klaas Schilder, a well-educated and prolific pastor-theologian-churchman. Schilder attained a heroic persona within the denomination. Biographers depict him as a brilliant theologian and churchman who stood against a rushing tide of issues that threatened the church. He bravely opposed the atrocities of World War II, and like many pastors in that period, ministered in a context of fear, sacrifice, and deep loss. Though Schilder’s theological views were embraced by some and rejected by others, his principled, tireless, and self-sacrificial nature would seem to justify many of the laudable things that have been said of him. Numerous churches, pastors and congregants followed the leadership of Schilder through a large controversy which became known as the “Vrijmaking” (liberation).

At the heart of this ecclesiastical controversy was the doctrine of the covenant and the particular concern for the proper way to address the baptized people of God through preaching. Much has been written on this subject, and it is not our intention to repeat what has been written elsewhere. Still, the long and tense debate surrounding issues relating to Abraham Kuyper’s view of the covenant are an undeniable part of the justification for the new denomination in 1944. Concerns over the nature of the covenant, baptism, and assurance of salvation all intersected in this debate, not simply questions about preaching. But perhaps the real tipping point was the fact that those who did not embrace Kuyper’s view of the covenant felt that it was being imposed upon them in a way that was conscious-binding beyond the church’s established polity. While it is not our intention to evaluate the ecclesiastical issues within that debate, it

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22 Article 31 of the Church Order was central to this discussion and the formation of the new church. Handboek Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Kampen: Kok, 2010), 811-813. See also “Church Polity in 1886 and 1944” by C. Veenhof, trans. by Theodore Plantinga in Schilder’s Struggle for the Unity of the Church, 459-464.
could be suggested that one of the reasons why RH preaching may have waned so quickly is that it was born in the context of this largely inward-facing, ecclesiastical debate.²³

Another key background against which the development of RH preaching also needs to be seen is the modernistic, critical approach to the Bible, with its attack upon the Bible’s history, unity, and integrity. Advocates of the RH preaching paradigm saw themselves as defending a consistently Reformed, orthodox response to the higher critical paradigm insofar as the RH approach sought to stress the continuity and integrity of the Bible, and especially the importance of history. Emphasizing the covenantal continuity of the Bible was not simply perceived as the most proper way to approach the Bible homiletically; it was also seen as a significant apologetic tool to help keep the foundation of the church from being swept away by the swiftly moving tide of modernism.

This apologetic concern can be illustrated by the way in which some of the early advocates of RH preaching saw a threat in the writings of Karl Barth and the “neo-orthodox” approach to theology, as well as others who were effectively stripping the Bible of its historical character and reducing it to subjective, existential, religious encounters with God. Sermons from the higher critical and neo-orthodox points of view were perceived as effectively re-writing the confessional script of the church and radically (if not subtly) reducing the content of preaching to subjective application. Many Reformed theologians of that day found these strange winds to be as threatening to the spiritual peace and welfare of the churches in Europe as the world wars were to its physical peace and welfare. Schilder, for instance, had done his PhD dissertation in Germany, writing on the topic of paradox.²⁴ The idea of paradox is well-known in Barth’s writings. Schilder developed a clear suspicion of Barth’s theology and others whose theological formulations were implying a dubious critique on the historical reliability of the Bible and by implication the nature of the church’s theological stances.²⁵ The RH hermeneutic and its emphasis on history became both a pastoral and theological way of equipping the church to

²⁵ George Harinck, from the introduction, Wie is die man? 12.
respond to the formidable foes of the so-called “higher criticism” of the Bible on one hand, and the subtle, and therefore difficult to address, theological nuances of neo-orthodoxy on the other.

Thus, when we consider the intra and extra-ecclesiastical context of the early development of the RH preaching paradigm, we need to recognize its complexity. It would be too simplistic to identify it as something that myopically developed *within the church*, as though pressures and issues outside the church (political, philosophical and theological) had no influence. But these issues would not remain at the forefront of the church’s life forever. The flame of those original concerns would eventually cool, as the new denomination began to take on its own identity and confront new challenges. But what became of preaching?

Again we return to Schilder and his legacy. Schilder is the obvious and well-known father of the RH movement. However, in spite of all the commendable things that might be said about him, his work was not always easy to follow. This perspective is acknowledged by those within Schilder’s tradition who are sympathetic with his views. Many of Schilder’s sermons are like masterfully artistic paintings, yet they are not always easily read, either in Dutch or in English translations. Thus, the early fruit of one of the leading pioneers of the RH preaching paradigm in the Netherlands remained somewhat hidden behind a lofty, poetic, yet esoteric vocabulary which may have caused subsequent generations to describe RH preaching as being antiquated and inaccessible.

It may also be fair to suggest that not only was Schilder somewhat difficult to read; the movement itself, especially within the Netherlands, has been characterized (if not caricatured) as being a lofty, overly intellectual approach to preaching. As we shall demonstrate, RH preaching was developed as a pointed reaction to psychologizing and subjectivizing preaching paradigms, as well as those that might be described as moralistic or exemplaristic. In doing so, it also

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27 While Schilder is well-known to many who are interested in RH preaching, too few are aware of some of the distinct contributions on the subject by homileticians such as B. Holwerda, M.B. Van ’t Veer, C. Veenhof, H.J. Schilder, C. Trimp, and C.J. de Ruijter, as well as others whose particular contributions will resurface at various points throughout this dissertation.
29 This is a bit of a pun as Schilder’s name means “painter” in Dutch.
reacted rather strongly to the traditionally embraced “uitleggen en toepassen” (explication and application) approach to preaching.\(^{30}\) This exposition and application approach to preaching was the dominant paradigm during that time. We must highlight the important fact that sympathizers with the RH preaching paradigm believed sermons that focused on the subjective life of the believer and her keeping of the commandments inevitably weakened the believer’s ground of assurance, as it located the source of assurance more on the believer’s obedience than upon the finished work of Christ. To state it simply, those who favored the RH preaching paradigm and left the GKN to join the GKv, did so in part as a pastoral attempt to guard the liberty of pastors to hold varying views of the covenant; and perhaps just as importantly, to protect the doctrine of the believer’s assurance of salvation. As D. Van Dijk reflects in his own path toward becoming a GKv pastor, “The ultimate reason for all the uncertainty in our people’s hearts lay in an error they were making: they sought the requisite certainty in themselves rather than in God’s promises.”\(^{31}\) And further:

> Once I had come to these insights, they made quite a difference in how I went about my work as a minister—in my visits to the sick, in my catechism classes, and especially in a preaching...Such a change in insight with regard to the meaning of the covenant for the life of the congregation had definite implications for how we preach.\(^{32}\)

This illustrates the fact that discussions around RH preaching were inseparably connected to complex yet important pastoral and theological issues, not just the issues of moralism and exemplarism.

Several particular factors need to be noted. The first is that what developed in the place of the paradigms perceived by RH preachers as being overly subjective, became in the eyes of many an over-emphasis on the objective facts of history.\(^{33}\) RH sermons were often seen as brilliant, intensely exegetical, and very God-centered; but could also be perceived as flying high over the hearts and lives of God’s people without necessarily touching down upon the practical

\(^{30}\) The emblem of the ‘doctrine and application’ (uitleggen en toepassen) paradigm at that time was found in the homiletic of T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, 1926).


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 213-214.

\(^{33}\) “In the so-called redemptive-historical vision of preaching it is a basic fact that the sermon only does justice to the (historical) text while the whole of Scripture and especially its emphasis on the coming of Christ stands central. The strong one-sided focus on the coming of Christ as the bridge across the historical distance between the historical Bible-stories and the community of today was at the same time a factor that hindered the further development of this important vision of preaching.” De Ruijter, *Horen naar de stem van God*, 112, fn. 34. Translation mine.
realities of daily life. Second, there were numerous inconsistencies within the movement that called its coherence and credibility into question. Schilder, for instance, decried the exemplaristic use of Scripture as a means of making positive or negative comparisons in a moralistic manner. Yet his own preaching would occasionally betray his methodology. An additional difficulty came with attempting to apply Schilder’s idea of locating all texts in their historical plot-line. Many Old Testament texts could not always be easily located in their exact historical context per the RH method, and even Schilder’s own Christus in Zijn Lijden evidences the tension of locating every text in the gospel narratives in a perfectly straight plot-line.

Eventually, a tension developed between those who were committed to a pure expression of RH preaching and those for who sought for greater application or relevance in preaching. This distance would slowly increase over subsequent decades in the Netherlands, as RH preaching was perceived as an idealistic reaction to certain trends and excesses within the church of the past, rather than as a model that would necessarily be the homiletic way of the church’s future. Many, even within the GKv, would eventually treat the RH preaching model with the respectful sentiment that one would show their grandparents. In time, RH sermons, along with much of the literature surrounding the RH debate, were regarded nostalgically rather than as urgently needed preaching tools with contemporary relevance and efficacy. New issues began to take center stage with the GKv, and in this light we might suggest that the heightened attention to RH preaching slowly began to fade to the background.

In summary, the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands took strongest root in a relatively small church that was struggling to keep its identity within a changing, fractured

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35 This criticism was most notably leveled against Schilder for the negative examples he employed from Scripture to describe certain leaders within the church. See G.C. Berkouwer “Verval der Exegese” Gereformeerde Weekblad 2, no. 35 (1947): 273. See also Schilder’s “Bijbel en Relativisme”, Gereformeerde Weekblad 3, no. 32 (1948): 250. Cited in Renninger, The New Testament Use of Historical Narrative, 23.
36 Greidanus, Sola Scriptura, 176-177.
38 Rein Bos viewed RH preaching as becoming too predictable (voorspelbaar), and that it failed to answer the question of how the people today connect with the text of yesterday through the sermon. In the end, RH sermons remained overly objective. Identificatiemogelijkheden, 74, 77-78.
39 For additional suggestions as to why this appears to be the case in the Netherlands, see Baars, “Heilshistorische prediking in deze tijd,” pp.14-15. Baars concludes his article by suggesting that there are still important aspects of redemptive-historical preaching that are worth considering.
world. The long shadow of World War II and a variety of inter-ecclesiastical dynamics kept much of the church’s focus inward. The great desire to be the ‘true church’ created a fortified climate of corporate theological introspection. In other words, the RH preaching debate was a good and fruitful debate in many ways, but it could easily be suggested that it produced a reactionary homiletic method that focused on the needs of the baptized, and yet may have failed to produce a homiletic paradigm that focused on the evangelistic needs of the unbaptized. This focus effectively guaranteed that the growth of the church, and the love for RH preaching, would have to come from within—or the church would not grow. In this light, we will suggest here (and develop more fully later) that the RH preaching paradigm remains in need of a more outward focus, as well as additional conversation partners.\(^{40}\)

2.3 Interest in Redemptive-Historical Preaching Outside the Netherlands

In light of the comments in the previous section, it is a small irony that the current climate of interest in RH hermeneutics and preaching is arguably stronger outside the Netherlands than within it. At this point, a careful distinction needs to be made between the distinctively Dutch version of the RH paradigm and its broader use outside the Netherlands. As noted above, even those who were labeled as “exemplaristic” in the RH preaching debates, were, generally speaking, sympathetic to many of the RH concerns; particularly the importance of seeing Christ in all of Scripture and of locating a text, as much as possible, in its place in history. Both sides in Holland agreed with that. The particular point of contention was on the use of biblical characters as examples, whether positive or negative, in what was perceived as ‘moralistic’ ways that violated the intention of the biblical text. Thus, especially for those unfamiliar with the nuances of the RH debate, there are many (see below) who might be identified as RH in the broad sense of the term, but not in the narrow sense as defined by advocates like Schilder, Holwerda, Van ‘t Veer and Van Dijk.\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) This sentiment is expressed by the current president of the Theologische Universiteit Kampen (the theological university associated with the Vrijgemaakt church), Mees te Velde, “Vrijgemaakte vreemdelingen tussen verleden en toekomst: Een nabeschouwing” in Vrijgemaakte vreemdelingen: Visies uit de vroege jaren van het Gereformeerd-vrijgemaakte leven (1944-1950) op kerk, staat, maatschappij, cultuur, gezin (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2007), 176-177.

\(^{41}\) Henceforth, we shall refer to this narrow understanding of the RH paradigm in Holland as “RHD” (=Redemptive Historical Dutch).
In non-Dutch speaking contexts, interest in Dutch-Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, and Geerhardus Vos has caused pastors and theologians to reflect more on the theological developments in the Netherlands. Herman Bavinck studies have seen a significant resurgence of interest, particularly as a result of the re-publication (in English) of his four-volume systematic theology, beginning with the *Prolegomena* in 2003.\(^42\) Though a large percentage of Abraham Kuyper’s work has been translated into English for some time, there is currently a strong amount of interest in his work in several ecclesiastical and academic circles, as is expressed in the *Neo-Kuyperian* school of thought and related theological projects.\(^43\) Herman Ridderbos has become well-recognized in the English-speaking world, as a representative of the RH paradigm, especially outside the Netherlands. This is an irony to many in the GKv tradition, as Ridderbos chose to remain in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN) and not join Schilder and the GKv.\(^44\) While these important Dutch theologians have in one way or another indirectly fueled the current climate of interest in RH hermeneutics and preaching, it is toward the particular contributions of Geerhardus Vos that we must now turn our attention.

Vos’s influence has been felt in numerous directions. He had a significant hand in bringing Kuyper and Bavinck to Princeton for their Stone Lectures.\(^45\) Vos was also influential on the work of Louis Berkhof\(^46\) and Herman Ridderbos.\(^47\) Vos’s *Biblical Theology made a


\(^{43}\) We do not mean to imply that Kuyper ought to be described as an RH preacher. It would be more fitting to align him with the puritan doctrine/application approach to preaching. See Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, trans. and ed. Harry Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), esp. 185-204. Still, interest in Kuyper has generated lateral interest in figures like Schilder and even the development of RH preaching in Kuyper’s generation.


\(^{47}\) Herman Ridderbos’ *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* leaned heavily upon Vos, and Ridderbos apparently acknowledged to Marianne Radius (the daughter of Geerhardus and Catherine Vos) “a great dependence upon her
landmark contribution to the science of hermeneutics, and perhaps just as importantly is his magnum opus, The Pauline Eschatology. Vos is reputed as being a bulwark in the development of Reformed biblical theology, and is hallowed as the “father of the amillenial view of eschatology in America.” His exegetical method is an unambiguous embodiment of an RH hermeneutic. He is well known for his metaphor in which he describes the history of revelation as a rose seed that slowly grows into a fully bloomed, beautiful rose. For Vos, the opening chapters of Genesis introduce the story line of the Bible in seed form, particularly the protoeuangelion. That seed is viewed as having fully blossomed in the climax of redemptive history, the work of Jesus Christ in his death and particularly his resurrection. Important for Vos is the idea that all the DNA of the maturely blossomed rose is latent within the rose seed itself. The difference between one and the other, in his view, is not a difference in substance, but a difference in maturity—history. This organic metaphor is not something invented by Vos but inherited and developed from the Reformed theological tradition, and particularly the influence of Bavinck.

What is of note, however, is that not all who have come to appreciate Vos’s work are from a distinctively Dutch-Reformed background. Rather, Vos represents a viable alternative to the significant influence of dispensationalism that has towered over the landscape of

father in his own thinking.” See James T. Dennison, Jr., The Letters of Geerhardus Vos (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005), pg. 81, fn. 208.


51 For a in-depth treatment of the organic metaphor in Bavinck, see James Eglinton, Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck’s Organic Motif (London: T&T Clark, 2012), particularly chapter 3 “Bavinck’s Organic Motif.”

52 Vos began his teaching career in the Christian Reformed Church at what would become Calvin Seminary. He later moved to Princeton to teach there, and transferred his ministerial credentials into the PCUSA.
evangelical hermeneutics and homiletics.\textsuperscript{53} Vos’s notable reception of late in various ecclesiastical circles ought to be seen against the background of dispensationalism’s approach to the unity of Scripture, and its implications especially for preaching from the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{54} Vos’s biblical-theological (RH) star has undoubtedly been recently seen against this sky. Dispensational hermeneutics have caused many to wrestle with the homiletic implications of the Old Testament for the church.\textsuperscript{55} Challenges to preaching from the Old Testament, and particularly the issue of moralistic preaching, have come from those inside and outside of dispensational circles.\textsuperscript{56} The particular difficulty within dispensationalism is the hermeneutical struggle to see the gospel in the warp and woof of the Old Testament. In short, when Christ and the gospel are not seen as the base-note of the Old Testament, moralistic (Christ-less) preaching will inevitably take its place. Apart from a Christ-centered emphasis, as Goldsworthy notes, “Much that passes for application of the Old Testament to the Christian life is only moralizing.”\textsuperscript{57}

This struggle has sparked an interest in RH exegetes such as Vos and others, whose approach to the Bible stresses the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and a Christ-centered focus within each.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, whereas dispensational hermeneutics have often fostered moralistic preaching, especially from the Old Testament, by contrast, RH hermeneutics often have fostered

\textsuperscript{53} Vern Poythress notes Vos’s influence on those who sought to develop covenant theology in contrast to Dispensational hermeneutics and its implications for Old Testament teaching and preaching in his Understanding Dispensationalists (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 40.

\textsuperscript{54} David Holwerda well-summarizes the main issue within Dispensationalism on this point: “When Jewish Israel did not accept Jesus as Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy was interrupted. During this interruption the gospel went out to the Gentiles and the church was formed, but dispensationalists hold that this was not God’s original purpose and that it does not fulfill the Old Testament promises for the simple reason that the Church is not Israel.” Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{55} See, for instance, the unanswered questions raised by James Rosscup about seeing Christ in the Old Testament in “Hermeneutics and Expository Preaching” in Preaching: How to Preach Biblically ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 102-103. Many of the questions are also raised with a covenantal or RH approach to the Old Testament, though the answers are notably different. For helpfully balancing nuances from a “Progressive Dispensational point of view, see Randal Pelton, Preaching with Accuracy: Find Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), esp. 41-44.

\textsuperscript{56} For a list of additional problems, see Scott Gibson, “Challenges to Preaching the Old Testament” in Preaching the Old Testament, ed. Scott Gibson, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 24-24. Carol Kaminski argues, “This exegetical fallacy, called moralizing, assumes the main point of the OT story is to teach a moral principle.” See “Preaching From the Historical Books” in Preaching the Old Testament, Ibid., 62.


\textsuperscript{58} Craig Blaising notes that “many dispensationalists have welcomed these developments [from biblical theology] as clarifying insights into the normal function of literary language and its interpretation.” “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition” in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition eds. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 31.
Christ-centered preaching. Vos’s RH heirs have sought to redress these issues both hermeneutically and homiletically. It is worthwhile to think further about some of those whom Vos influenced, both directly and indirectly.

Vos taught at Princeton for 39 years (from 1893-1932). He had many notable American Presbyterian pastors and theologians as students. Though the early decades of Vos’s work seemed to draw only modest attention, his posthumous influence has had a much broader scope. His real influence on the pulpit is not simple to trace, but can be seen in the writings of homileticians such as Edmund Clowney and Dennis Johnson. Clowney’s Preaching and Biblical Theology is heavily dependent upon Vos. Clowney’s influence perpetuates this family tree in numerous directions. Dennis Johnson’s recent work on homiletics is a thorough, contemporary attempt to embody an unambiguously RH model from a Vosian perspective. Clowney’s influence on Timothy Keller is well known, and perhaps embodied most clearly in the Doctor of Ministry course they did together on preaching at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando. Keller’s recent book on preaching also makes frequent allusion to Clowney, and expresses an appreciative interaction with Clowney throughout.

Vos’s legacy is also notable in the work of several theologians who have not focused on homiletics per se, but upon other aspects of theology. Richard Gaffin Jr.’s long career at Westminster Seminary has been marked by teaching and preaching to several generations of pastors and theologians in a Vosian perspective, and includes editing a number of Vos’s works, as well as being involved in the current project of translating Vos’s four-volume Dogmatiek. Various biographical works on Vos illustrate not simply his influence but also the surge of

59 J. Gresham Machen, John Murray, and Cornelius Van Til, Ned B. Stonehouse were just a few. Richard Lints has an even longer list in his The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomena to Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 182-183, fn. 90.
60 For the influence of Vos on a particular denomination, see Charles Dennison, “Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” in History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison, eds. Danny Olinger and David Thompson (Willow Grove: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002), 67-90. James Dennison (brother of Charles) has since started a seminary built around the distinctives of Vos’s theological method. See http://www.nwts.edu/statement.htm.
64 Timothy Keller, Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism (New York: Viking, 2015), see esp. 6, 60, 71.
65 Geerhardus Vos, Reformed Dogmatics, ed. Richard Gaffin. 5 Vol. Lexham Press, forthcoming. See also Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation. Gaffin has also written about Vos in numerous places.
academic interest in (re)discovering Vos.\textsuperscript{66} Vos’s influence on the Reformed apologist Cornelius Van Til is significant, though often under-appreciated. John Muether helpfully notes the impact of Vos’s covenant theology on Van Til’s philosophy of revelation and history.\textsuperscript{67} The point we are trying to make here is that through Vos, many have discovered and sought to perpetuate a hermeneutical approach to the Bible which must be seen as RH, even outside the realm of homiletics.

However, Vos’s hermeneutical approach has had significant homiletic implications for those who have embraced it. Thus, again we feel the irony that a surge of interest in RH hermeneutics and homiletics is developing outside of the Netherlands. While some are familiar with the RH developments in the Netherlands, many are not and are discovering the RH model through authors like Vos and those who have followed after him. The RH family tree is broad has diverse branches and deep roots. While certain branches seem to be growing more quickly than others, the tree is a long way from dead. It is remarkably alive and teeming with new life. This can be further demonstrated by looking at other sides of the RH family tree.

The family tree of RH homiletics begins to branch out to those whom we might describe as having an interest in RH preaching and hermeneutics, but not necessarily descending directly from Vos’s side of the family tree of biblical theology. Bryan Chapell, for instance, expresses dependence upon the Dutch-Reformed family tree of biblical theology in the development of his \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}.\textsuperscript{68} The work of Australian Graeme Goldsworthy has done much to vitalize interest in contemporary questions related to RH preaching and hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{69} Both Chapell’s and Goldsworthy’s homiletic works have gained significant attention internationally.

Finally, we should not fail to mention the very important work of Sidney Greidanus. His 1970 Th.D. dissertation \textit{Sola Scriptura}\textsuperscript{70} on the RH preaching debates is almost single-handedly

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  \item \textsuperscript{66} See Dennison, “The Life of Geerhardus Vos” in \textit{The Letters of Geerhardus Vos.}, 13-86. See also the prominent place given to Vos by Richard Barcellos, \textit{The Family Tree of Reformed Biblical Theology: Geerhardus Vos and John Owen: Their Method of and Contribution to the Articulation of Redemptive History} (Pelham: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2010). George Harinck is currently working on a biography of Geerhardus Vos that will appear in the \textit{American Reformed Biographies} series.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Bryan Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Among Goldsworthy’s many important works, we would highlight the importance of his distinctive homiletic effort in Graeme Goldsworthy, \textit{Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
  \item \textsuperscript{70} See citation above in fn. 2.
\end{itemize}
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responsible for the broader awareness among English speakers of the RH preaching debates that took place in the Netherlands. He has subsequently published numerous books on the topic of Christ-centered preaching. Although his writings have received criticism from both Dutch and English speaking advocates of RH preaching, his work still retains a very significant place in discussions about RH preaching. Though we intend to interact with nuances of Greidanus’ work at various points, we cannot overstate the importance of his writings for the English-speaking world. Nearly every English work on RH homiletics expresses some aspect of dependence and appreciation, whether positive or negative, upon Greidanus’ dissertation. It is a bit of an academic concern that so many writers and preachers are effectively dependent upon one source (Greidanus) as their primary filter for describing and understanding this important homiletic debate. We could only imagine that if Greidanus were rewriting the book today, after years of reflection, he might nuance certain things. We would add to this that there are certainly other voices which would enlarge our perception of the debate, but those voices are not heard due to language barriers. Thus, a temptation exists to see the debate myopically or miss certain nuances—even worse, to create regrettable caricatures and unnecessary dichotomies when describing RH preaching. It is hoped that this dissertation, in spite of its imperfections, might shed a little light on a few of these perceptions which shall be addressed in subsequent chapters.

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71 We will list the two works of Sidney Greidanus we think are most important: *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), and perhaps more importantly, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).


73 Terry Johnson’s critique seems to reflect many of the frequently expressed concerns. So he says, “The problem with the redemptive-historical extremists is three-fold. First, the ethical thrust of the New Testament, which is not inconsiderable, disappears. All preaching becomes about Jesus and the cross, that is, about justification by faith. Everything else is a footnote to justification. As a consequence, preaching becomes predictable, cliché, and boring. Flights of redemptive-historical fancy become commonplace, as texts are twisted to say what they do not say, forced to teach what they do not teach, while what they do teach is lost. “Preaching the Point,” downloaded September 6, 2014. Viewable at [http://theaquilareport.com/preaching-the-point/](http://theaquilareport.com/preaching-the-point/). In addition, Timothy Bayly portrays RH preaching as being unconfused with appeals to the heart and treating every verse as if it were John 3:16. “Covenant Succession and the Emasculation of the Church” in *To You and Your Children: Examining the Biblical Doctrine of Covenant Succession* ed. Benjamin K. Wikner (Moscow: Canon Press, 2005), 137.
2.4 Homiletics in the Context of Other Theological Disciplines

Homiletics is a specific theological discipline but it is not an isolated one. In order for it to be properly approached, it must be done in cooperation with, and submission to other theological disciplines. We have in mind here the disciplines of exegetical theology, systematic theology, and even historical theology. Homiletics, which is a subset of practical theology, must be seen as a flower that grows in the field among these other disciplines. In this light, not only can we imagine the most proper approach to homiletics, we can also see the way in which the revival of interest in RH preaching branches out into the other disciplines, as practical theology cannot ultimately or healthfully be separated from them.

Beginning with exegetical theology, we cannot help but reiterate that the current interest in RH homiletics is wed to an interest in RH hermeneutics. But as many have pointed out, what some call RH (or “salvation-historical”), others refer to as biblical theology. Both of these terms have been used by authors with various meanings. This terminology was developed at the turn of the 20th century in the context of difficult debates between advocates of the higher-critical approach to the Bible and its more conservative defenders. Theologians would subsequently employ the term and nuance its intended meaning. The same is true of the term “biblical theology.” While Vos and many RH theologians employ the term in a particular way, there is also a large school of “biblical theologians” who employ the term quite differently from Vos.

More to our point is the fact that there are numerous books (homiletic works, commentaries, monographs, etc.) which employ a hermeneutic that might be described as RH, while actually showing little, if any, familiarity with the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands. Some of them also show little to no dependence upon theologians such as Vos, Ridderbos, and Bavinck, though it is likely. In certain examples, we find authors make use of theologians such as Vos only in some of their works, but then seem to perpetuate an exegetical

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74 Vos’s own vocabulary makes this point. See his “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and Discipline,” 21-22. For a review of the topic in a GkV oriented homiletic that makes the connection between Vos and “Biblical Theology,” see Piet Houtman, This Is Your God! Preaching Biblical History (Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2010), 91-93.

approach that is notably consistent with the RH paradigm. We could take, for example, the recent *Reformed Expository Commentary* series. This series is self-consciously attempting to embody an RH approach to the Bible, yet is not quoting repeatedly from what we might call RH sources (certainly not Dutch ones). We note with interest this statement in the series introduction:

> ...These commentaries are redemptive-historical in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith.⁷⁶

Alongside this could be placed the recent *Gospel in the Old Testament* series which is written in a Vosian trajectory, and is “committed to the proposition that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is a unified revelation of God, and that its thematic unity is found in Christ.”⁷⁷ Something similar could be said of the prolific writings of G.K. Beale, who quotes from more recognized RH authors at times, yet the general orientation of his writings reflects obvious RH concerns. The point here is that we ought not to reduce RH hermeneutics to a short list of Dutch authors, but rather recognize that many contemporary theologians are approaching Scripture in the light of RH concerns, and that this is seen in much recent exegetical work.

We could add to this the recent discussions about the relationship between biblical and systematic theology, a discussion that also is being juxtaposed to questions about RH hermeneutics and preaching. Regarding systematic theology, we agree with Vos that, “Dogmatics is the crown which grows out of all the work that biblical theology can accomplish.”⁷⁸ Without biblical theology there would not be systematic theology, or to say it differently, it is impossible to achieve a healthy systematic theology apart from employing a biblically sound hermeneutical approach.⁷⁹ To the extent that the RH hermeneutic is biblical, it is essential for forming proper exegetical conclusions about particular texts—hence, systematic

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theology. We note with delight the attempts in recent decades (for instance the work of authors such as Michael Horton and Richard Gamble, etc.)\(^{80}\) to consider doing systematic theology with an approach that seeks to do justice to broader understanding of RH hermeneutics (\textit{a la} Herman Ridderbos, Vos, etc.). It is interesting that even Vos himself wrote a systematic theology.\(^{81}\) While each of these authors ought to be appreciated for their unique contributions, it is undeniable that they are systematicians who employ an RH hermeneutic.

We would also mention here the important way in which systematic theology is effectively the logical conclusion of biblical theology. Consider the crucial way in which the creeds of the church help to embody the “faith once and for all delivered to the saints.”\(^{82}\) To put it differently, the Bible does not simply commend the idea of teaching hermeneutics, but of also teaching the “sound doctrine”\(^{83}\) that is derived from sound hermeneutics. It is with these thoughts in mind that we recognize the inseparable relationship of RH hermeneutics to recent work and discussions in systematic theology. The revived interest in the former has sparked important discussions about the latter. Without systematic theology, biblical theology would be a lone flower in a garden without variety, with no fence to protect it. Thus, while assessing the renewed expressions of interest in RH hermeneutics, we must also consider the way in which that discussion has been carried on in the arena of systematic theology, and the way in which systematic theology protects and supports both those who preach and those who are preached to.\(^{84}\)

2.5 The Newness of Redemptive-Historical Preaching

The last area we address is that of historical theology. We suggest here that the resurgence of interest in RH hermeneutics and homiletics has raised some intriguing questions


\(^{81}\) Geerhardus Vos, \textit{Dogmatiek: Vol. 1 Theologie, Anthropologie; Vol. 2 Soteriologie; Vol. 3 Christologie; Vol. 4 Ecclesiologie, Media Gratia, Eschatologie}. (Grand Rapids: 1896).

\(^{82}\) Jude 3.

\(^{83}\) I Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1.

from a historical theological perspective. How truly new is the RH paradigm of preaching? Can it be found with the church fathers, the reformers, or protestant orthodox theologians? Is the RH hermeneutic consistent with the creeds and catechisms of the church? Did Vos, Schilder, or those in their generation really introduce something “new” to the Reformed theological world? Would sermons, commentaries, or other exegetical works from these various periods reveal a similar sort of preaching paradigm? While some of these questions have been addressed, we might suggest that others warrant further investigation. Yet these questions, while very important, do not trump what must be the first question: “Is this RH preaching paradigm biblical?” Anthony Selvaggio answers this way:

What we now refer to as Biblical Theology or the Redemptive-Historical approach has been with the church since the dawn of the New Testament era. However, it is my contention that the controversy in the Netherlands was the genesis event for the modern development of the approach and also served to fuel the modern debate over how to preach the Old Testament in the Reformed church.  

We would suggest that historically speaking, it is very important to recognize that Vos was not the first one to liken the covenant promise of the Bible as a development of a seed into a flower. Schilder and Holwerda were not the first to oppose moralistic, overly subjective preaching, and Clowney was not the first to argue for preaching Christ from all of Scripture. None of these theologians were Copernican revolutionaries. They were modern reformers at best.

Recent explorations in historical theology are proving that the RH preaching paradigm is better likened to a slowly growing family tree than a spontaneous big bang. Richard Barcellos puts it well, “Does Reformed Theology have to wait until Vos to find adherents to a more redemptive-historical approach to Scripture?” While there are certainly varying opinions on

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86 Though following and building upon Clowney’s work, perhaps the most thorough and persuasive defense of the contemporary expression of RH preaching from an exegetical point of view is Johnson’s Him We Proclaim. See especially chapters 3, 6, 9, and 10. Tae-Hyeun Park’s recent and impressive dissertation notes that some of the questions now being asked about Puritan preaching were sparked by similar questions that surfaced in the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands. The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Puritan Preaching in a Pneumatological Perspective (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2005), esp. 9-11.

the question of the newness of RH preaching, it is the position (and underlying assumption) of this dissertation that it is not a *de novo* homiletic approach. Rather, we contend that the RH homiletic approach has a biblical foundation and historical antecedents. In saying this, we readily acknowledge the danger of anachronism, one that reads something contemporary *back* into previous documents. While that danger ought to be borne in mind, it is at the same time true and proper to admit that those who have argued for an RH approach to hermeneutics and homiletics have done so foremost from Scripture itself and secondly from the timely deposits of church history (creeds, commentaries, sermons, etc.). Additionally, historical-theological investigations have demonstrated continuity between the RH sermons of the last century and sermons from various points along the trail of church history.88 Awareness of this must check, if not dispel, the idea that RH preaching is altogether *new*.

Even with these qualifications, there is no question that both advocates and critics of RH preaching (and its twin sister, biblical theology) treat the movement as being relatively young. In describing the preaching debates in the Netherlands, it was and still is somewhat popular to describe the debate as beginning in a certain time-period—typically the 1930’s with the work of Klaas Schilder, *Christus in zijn lijden*.89 For example, John Carrick states, “The original controversy, which began in the Netherlands in 1930 with the publication of Schilder’s *Trilogy*, continued into the early 1940’s and subsequently faded.”90 Carrick’s perspective is not alone, as there are certainly others who hold to this view. Sidney Greidanus, upon whom Carrick’s description of the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands is immensely dependent, makes a similar observation. Greidanus also describes the inception of the debate as occurring in the 1930’s.91 According to Greidanus, “Schilder might be called the initiator of the redemptive-historical approach.”92 Huyser, a critic of Schilder and the RH approach, called Schilder in 1950

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89 Klaas Schilder, *Christus in Zijn lijden*, drie delen (Kampen: Kok, 1930). Published in English as *Christ and His Sufferings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938).
92 Ibid., 40.
the “auctor intellectualis” (intellectual author) and the “Urheber” (spiritual father) of this “novelty in Reformed homiletics.”

Still, this point of view is not so simple. Many in the GKv tradition would see the historical description in a similar light but would nuance it. Trimp, for instance, notes that it is particularly with the work of B. Holwerda in 1940 and 1942 respectively that the debate takes on a more formal character. It is in his article “De Heilshistorie in de Prediking” that Holwerda introduces the term “exemplarische” (exemplaristic). This term would prove to have far-reaching significance, as it labeled the preaching method that would be contrasted with RH preaching. Yet in the very article in which we find the so-called genesis of the terminology that ignites the RH preaching debate, Holwerda himself grounds the discussion in developments that go back to the first part of the 20th century, particularly citing an article of J. Ridderbos that appeared in 1922, and referencing issues that were clearly at play well before the 1930s.

Trimp also argues that prior to the RH preaching debate that began in the 1930’s, many of the concerns that became associated with the RH debate had been discussed in preceding centuries. He discusses the development of these ideas as they relate to homiletics in Luther and Calvin. Regarding the former he notes, “Luther spoke of a direct presentation of Christ and Christian doctrine in the Old Testament stories.” Trimp does not anachronistically suggest that Luther was an RH preacher. He also does not in any way deny Luther’s use of exemplum as a category of application in preaching. Yet Trimp notes that while Luther (as did Calvin) sought to distance himself from the allegorical method, at the same time, Luther also employed an approach to the Old Testament that was generally speaking, Christocentric. This approach to the Old Testament lies at the heart of the RH preaching debate.

Trimp’s point about a Christocentric hermeneutic in the time of the Reformation is upheld by numerous authors, not only in connection narrowly with the RH preaching debates, but especially within the family tree of biblical theology. John Fesko, for instance, notes the

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93 Ibid., emphasis added.
94 B. Holwerda, “De heilshistorie in de prediking” in Begonnen hebbende van Mozes. See especially 82.
95 Trimp, Preaching and the History of Salvation, 101.
96 Ibid 110.
97 Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments, 45. Daniel Doriani notes that, “Since Luther, Protestant theologians have been wary of the ‘imitation of Christ’ motif” and suggests this is due to its association with not only sentimental and subjective interpretations, but more importantly, the concern for “works-righteousness” oriented preaching. Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001), 201.
way in which the early reformers (i.e. Luther and Calvin) contain Christocentric nuances that ought to be seen in the long line of hermeneutical and homiletical concern that come to clearer expression in later centuries.  

Fesko traces this line backwards to the early church, including fathers such as Irenaeus. He also traces the work into the post-Reformation developments in covenant theology. His survey makes the point that while there is something new about biblical theology and the RH preaching paradigm; at the same time, there is much about it that is remarkably old. The long timeline of church history displays this development. Even such a strong advocate of the RH paradigm as Geerhardus Vos forces us to live with the reality that covenant theology is not born in a moment but develops slowly and organically in the theological and pastoral family tree of church history. Should not the same be said of RH preaching?  

Vos notes the relative newness of the discipline of biblical theology by referring to the “birth” of biblical theology that took place under the dark star of higher critical scholarship. Vos’s interaction with this school, and especially its strong anchor in Germany, reminds us in some ways of the early work and concerns of Klaas Schilder. George Harinck notes that on the one occasion when Schilder was able to meet Vos, Schilder expressed great interest in Vos’s work on the history of covenant theology. “Well now, I have seen him; the author of this remarkable brochure about the covenant concept in the older reformed [theologians].” Schilder then reflects on their discussion about the article and issues in covenant theology. It is easy to appreciate the ways in which Schilder might have found a friend in Vos. One cannot help but note the irony of the two supposed “fathers” of the RH paradigm sitting in the same room, neither truly aware of the legacy they would leave behind. Vos, like Schilder, was not simply an exegete, but also an apologist for orthodox, protestant theology. Much of their

99 See also James T. Dennison, Jr., “Irenaeus and Redemptive History” in Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers (Published by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2008), 67-72. See also Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology, 30-33.
100 Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology” in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, 234-267. Vos uses “organic” language throughout to describe the slowly developing nuances of covenant theology within the Reformed tradition. One cannot help but hear an echo of the way in which Vos also describes the “organic” development of covenant theology within Scripture itself.
102 George Harinck and Anne Jacob van Omme, “Schilders Amerikaanse reis van 1939” in Wie die man? Translation mine. Schilder is referring to Vos’s “De verbondsleer in de gereformeerde theologie” (Grand Rapids, 1981). The English title of the article is in fn. 94 above.
writings were effectively in response to the attacks of higher criticism, which seemed on the one hand to recognize the historical continuity of the Bible’s theological narrative, but sought to dismiss it out of hand on the basis of higher-critical assumptions and exegesis. To these challenges Vos and Schilder responded with a covenant theology that was rigorously exegetical and historically self-conscious.\textsuperscript{103}

Vos’s most unambiguous historical piece, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology” is a sweeping overview of the development of covenant theology from the time of the early reformers into the period of Protestant Scholasticism.\textsuperscript{104} While Vos does not identify the various theologians as being RH or biblical theological authors, he does note the long and nuanced approach to covenant theology that sought to harmonize both the unity and diversity of the Bible’s covenant theology. Vos’s article might be described as his attempt to sketch the family tree of Reformed, covenant theology, and to implicitly demonstrate the way in which his own covenant theology stood in the shadow of the countless giants that came before him.\textsuperscript{105} The higher critical school of thought wrongly divided the Bible into an overly fragmented collection of books rather than seeing it as a single, unified, and harmonious book (made up of many books) which ultimately tells one story of the promise-making, covenant-keeping God of the Bible and his singular plan to bring his kingdom climactically into the world through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Thus, the family tree of Reformed, covenantal theology is composed of time-tested branches and tender new shoots. The RH paradigm needs to be seen as a branch upon this family tree, not as a rogue offshoot, but an organic development within a movement nourished by various soils, and refined by its interactions with higher criticism, dispensationalism, and now postmodernism (which we will more fully address in chapter 6).

\textsuperscript{103} We would not imply by this that there were no distinctions between their covenant theologies. There certainly were, perhaps beginning with the issue of the covenant of works. For an interesting yet critical analysis of Vos’ understanding of covenant and election by someone in the GKv tradition, see Jelle Faber, American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 15-54.

\textsuperscript{104} Cited above.

\textsuperscript{105} Might Schilder have been interested in finding the same in Vos’s article?
2.6 Summary: The Discussion Continues

In this chapter we have tried to demonstrate that while interest in RH preaching has waxed and waned in ecclesiastical circles in the Netherlands, it is actively growing in other places around the world in various ways.\textsuperscript{106} Renewed interest in stalwart theologians such as Bavinck, Kuyper and Vos has promoted research into the RH hermeneutical paradigm, and its homiletic counterpart. At the more popular level, the works of well-known authors such as Tim Keller and Bryan Chapell have generated an interest in a Christ-centered approach to preaching that has clear family ties to the RH preaching paradigm that came out of the GKv. In this light, we agree with James Eglinton:

Without Vos the preaching of Bryan Chappell or Tim Keller is hard to imagine. foreigners that seek a Christocentric, biblical hermeneutic and homiletic often end up with the Dutch tradition by way of Vos.\textsuperscript{107}

While the work of Klaas Schilder is perhaps the best known of the GKv theologians,\textsuperscript{108} it is still likely that many who are discovering RH preaching through the more popular academic trails\textsuperscript{109} are doing so without significant knowledge of the RH developments in the GKv. Thus, there is a regrettable sense, especially as it relates to the science of homiletics, that many of the same issues are being revisited in virtual ignorance of the groundwork that has already been laid. To say it differently, much of the homiletic material being currently produced on preaching from the Old Testament (especially that which addresses issues of preaching Christ from the Old Testament and the question of application in preaching) is effectively creating or recreating the wheel of the RH preaching debate that took place in the Netherlands.

It is in light of these things that we can say that the drama of RH preaching continues. In both theologically Reformed circles and broadly evangelical circles, questions about preaching Christ from all of Scripture, and the issue of proper application in preaching, seem to be raising the level of interest in RH preaching both directly and indirectly. Finally, the particular challenge of postmodernism has caused the church to wrestle not only with preaching paradigms

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\textsuperscript{106} Hyun has ably demonstrated the significant influence of RH hermeneutics in Korea.\textemdash Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutics and Homiletics, 26.
\textsuperscript{107} James Eglinton, “Schilder als exportproduct” in Wie is die man? 189. Translation mine.
\textsuperscript{108} We would not fail to recognize the important contributions of theologians such as J. Douma, J. Van Bruggen, and S.G. de Graaf (who never joined the GKv), whose works have been translated into English; yet these authors appear to be somewhat less known than Schilder.
\textsuperscript{109} We have in mind here particular groups such as The Gospel Coalition and its recent interest in Christ-centered preaching.
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of the past, but also with the question of developing preaching paradigms that will prove useful in the future. It is at this point that we shall introduce our proposal of a homiletic paradigm that weds what we think is the best fruit of RH preaching with one of its distant cousins—the drama of redemption paradigm.
Chapter 3
The Drama of Redemption and Redemptive-Historical Preaching

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we surveyed a number of examples that demonstrate a revival of interest in RH preaching and subjects related to it. In this chapter we elaborate that idea more fully by developing a hermeneutical and theological approach that we believe is compatible with RH preaching, and when combined with it, has the remarkable potential to serve the church homiletically. The paradigm we wish to develop is the *Drama of Redemption*.\(^{110}\) It should be clarified at the outset that this paradigm is not our creation, but rather one that we are attempting to *synthesize* with RH preaching. What is suggestively new or creative about this chapter (and this dissertation) is the attempt to self-consciously wed the RH and DR paradigms into a creative and effective homiletic model in a postmodern age. In order to accomplish this, we shall begin by defining the DR paradigm according to some of its leading advocates. Second, we shall discuss the biblical use of the drama metaphor. Third, the historical development of the paradigm. Fourth, we discuss the application of the paradigm within the field of homiletics. Finally, we shall suggest several cautions concerning the DR paradigm in particular.

Numerous authors have advocated language that fits into the DR paradigm, yet for our purposes, we will be interacting significantly with the work of Kevin Vanhoozer and Michael Horton as leading contemporary representatives of the paradigm. Each of these authors has earned a respectable reputation in the academic world, both inside and outside their own ecclesiastical and theological contexts, and thus serve as helpful conversation partners. While their writings build upon the work of others, we find certain nuances in these two authors that we believe will prove to be particularly insightful contributions for the field of homiletics. Though we do not intend to look at Vanhoozer and Horton in isolation from others who are advocating a similar theological and rhetorical paradigm, we do want to highlight their particular influence upon the orientation of this and subsequent chapters.

\(^{110}\) Introduced as DR above.
3.2 Defining the Drama of Redemption

The DR paradigm might be defined as a hermeneutical and theological metaphor in which the Triune God is the author of the Spirit-directed script (Scripture) as well as its primary actor in Christ, who authoritatively calls man to creative, yet faithful participation (covenant obedience) in the historically unfolding kingdom of God upon the world stage of God’s glory. It is important to highlight that in our adoption of the DR metaphor, it is exactly that—a metaphor that we find helpful for a number of reasons; but not a triumphant metaphor, or even as the dominant biblical metaphor. The Bible employs many metaphors to be sure, and while we find a particular benefit to the drama metaphor both theologically and homiletically, its importance should not be overstated.

The above definition needs to be illustrated and unpacked in several ways. First, the rhetorical value of the phrase “drama of redemption” has surfaced in numerous theological monographs as a helpful means of wedding orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Michael Horton uses the DR vocabulary throughout his A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship,111 as well as in his more academic Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama.112 The former is an argument for seeing worship through the lens of covenant theology. The second book is part of a four-volume series in which the drama metaphor is frequently employed as an innovative way of thinking of Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Commenting on the four-volume project as a whole in the last book of the series, People and Place, Horton helpfully notes:

Further, this project has consistently defended an analogical account of the theological statements, appealing to the metaphor of drama to express the dynamic interplay between eschatology and history in the diverse covenantal administrations.113

In the introduction (“The Dogma is the Drama: A Theology for Pilgrims on the Way”) to his systematic theology, Horton summarizes the importance of the drama vocabulary for his emphasis on a practical approach to theology by saying,

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113 Michael Horton, People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), ix. For additional references to the drama metaphor, see esp. 40 and 98.
The inextricable connection of faith and practice in terms of drama, doctrine, doxology, and discipleship has evident corollaries in every philosophy, religion, and culture. The drama determines the big questions as well as the answers. The doctrines are convictions that arise in light of that drama.\footnote{Horton, \textit{The Christian Faith}, 15.}

Drama vocabulary peppers the work throughout, wedding theology, faith, and practice. The same could be said of his more popular \textit{Pilgrim Theology}, which appears to be based on his larger volume, \textit{The Christian Faith}. Drama language permeates \textit{Pilgrim Theology}, including a fairly programmatic definition of theology: “Theology is the \textit{lived}, social, and \textit{embodied} integration of drama, doctrine, doxology and discipleship.”\footnote{Horton, \textit{Pilgrim Theology}, 70, emphasis added.} Of key interest for us is the way in which Christ coming into the world to accomplish redemption and bring about the reality of his kingdom is viewed as the pinnacle of the biblical drama; underscored is the fact that this drama is something of which the church is a vital part, and not merely a passive spectator.\footnote{Ibid., 18. See also the appendix “From Drama to Discipleship: Applying the Coordinates to Key Doctrines,” pp. 474-478.}

In a book dedicated to the question of moving beyond the Bible to theology, Kevin Vanhoozer introduces the DR paradigm this way: “Going beyond the Bible biblically is ultimately a matter of participating in the great \textit{drama of redemption} of which Scripture is the authoritative testimony and holy script.”\footnote{Kevin Vanhoozer, “A Drama of Redemption Model: Always Performing?” in \textit{Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology}, eds. Gundry and Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 156-157, emphasis ours.} For Vanhoozer, the DR language is derived from, if not effectively equal to ‘canonical-linguistic theology.’\footnote{This appears to be a pun, offering an alternative to the ‘cultural-linguistic’ theological paradigm as found in George Lindbeck and postmodern hermeneutics. At the heart of the ‘canonical-linguistic’ is the idea of reading the Bible as one book with a unified story full of linguistic nuances. “At the heart of the canonical-linguistic approach is the proposal that we come to know God by attending to the uses to which language of God is put in Scripture itself. Scripture’s own use of Scripture is of particular interest, for the cradle of Christian theology is perhaps best located in the interpretive practice of Jesus and the apostles.” Kevin Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 22.} This phrase is important to Vanhoozer’s overall project, as it suggests that the canon of Scripture is both normative and thus determinative for the Christian life and worldview (in contrast to the cultural-linguistic emphasis of postmodernism). Thus, Vanhoozer proposes, “The burden of the present work is to commend the canonical-linguistic approach to theologians for its turn to practice, for its emphasis on wisdom, and for its creative retrieval of the principle \textit{sola scriptura}.”\footnote{Ibid., 16.} Further wedding the normative role of Scripture to the idea of participation, he says, “Canonical-linguistic theology
gives scriptural direction for one’s fitting participation in the drama of redemption today.”

Regarding the particular accent of a *lived* theology, Vanhoozer states:

> The drama of doctrine is about refining the dross of textual knowledge into the gold of Christian wisdom by putting one’s understanding of the Scriptures into practice…The proper end of the drama of doctrine is wisdom: lived knowledge, a performance of the truth.\(^{121}\)

Vanhoozer’s approach to theology is not simply one of conveying theological propositions, but communicating theology in the same dramatic sense in which it was first revealed (the drama of Scripture). Thus, in addition to conveying truth, Vanhoozer wants to incorporate the idea of “participation” in his theological endeavor, underscoring that Scripture was given to elicit a certain response from its recipients. Therefore, the theological enterprise must unite, rather than divide, orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

The above emphasis may help to explain the importance of the term “drama” over other similar terms (e.g. story, narrative, etc.). Vanhoozer’s preference for the term is due to several reasons. The first is that a drama, in contrast to a story, is seen and not just heard.

> While it is true that much of the Bible is written in the form of a story, narratives and dramas represent stories differently. Narratives require narrators and recount their tales in the first or third person. Dramas, by contrast, show rather than tell.\(^{122}\)

The ability to see or show is very important in this discussion, as the DR paradigm builds upon the presupposition that God has both spoken and acted in history.\(^{123}\) Theology, therefore, must not remain isolated or abstracted; it is meant to be seen and lived-out practically in the life of the church and the world.\(^{124}\) Vanhoozer refers often to a perceived weakness in epic (propositional) approaches to theology. In his words “The main problem with epic theology, then, is that it opts out of the drama altogether and takes an external, spectator’s perspective upon the contemplated play.”\(^{125}\) In this sense the story of theology is told, but not lived. Vanhoozer is clearly reacting to this type of theological approach, especially in his *The Drama of Doctrine*.

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\(^{120}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 48

\(^{123}\) D.A. Carson rightly notes that this is the necessary foundation of biblical interpretation. Carson also admits that while this reasoning is somewhat circular, it is impossible for hermeneutics to be presupposition-less. See his *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 21, 36.

\(^{124}\) De Graaf wrestles with this tension, suggesting that the Biblical story ought to be told in a way that draws people into the story, yet he also argues against dramatizing the story. S. G. De Graaf, *Verbondsgeschiedenis: Schetsen voor de vertelling van de Bijbelsche geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1935), 1.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 86.
It is thus important to recognize that the DR paradigm is developed against the background of epical approaches to theology which tend to be more abstract or propositional in nature. We would express caution here, however, lest this concern be misrepresented. Vanhoozer is not suggesting the DR paradigm is a move against or away from propositions or propositional theology (neither are we), but rather a move beyond mere propositions to a theological approach that is wed to living out theology.126 “The Bible is not reducible to abstract scientia, but must be seen always as sapientia—wisdom to be lived.”127 It is the abstracting of doctrine that concerns Vanhoozer, and which the DR paradigm seeks to redress. The truth of Christianity was not meant to be simply believed, but rather “felt, done, and loved.”128

An analogy can be seen between propositional theology and epic approaches to literature, movies, etc. Each preserves the ability for the reader/viewer to remain at a safe distance from the story. They are spectators, passively witnessing the story as it is told or unfolded before them. Even a dramatic play has this potential. But the particular type of drama we are advocating in the DR paradigm is an interactive drama in which the audience does not simply witness the drama, but also participates within it. The drama of the Bible is a story to be joined, not simply described or summarized by abstract propositions that keep its readers at a safe, unaffected distance. Thus, the DR approach to theology is concerned not simply to state theology in propositional form, but to show the church how to live out its theology, thus narrowing the divide between practical and theoretical theology.129

This concern to see a move in theology from the bare communication of systematic propositions to lived-out appropriations is shared and echoed in defining statements by other advocates of the DR paradigm. Horton employs the term in a similar definition to Vanhoozer, saying, “Theology is the church’s reflection on God’s performative action in word and deed and its own participation in the drama of redemption.”130 We note again the importance of the term “participation.” While the church is clearly to reflect on the words and works that God has done

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127 Ibid., 276.
128 Ibid., 288.
129 C.J. de Ruijter notes the regrettable distance between these two theological poles. *Meewerken met God: Ontwerp van een gereformeerde praktische theologie* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), 11. We should also observe that older theological works like Calvin’s *Institutes* and Bavinck’s *Dogmatics* certainly bear a warm and “practical” tone, insisting upon and embodying both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), 469.
in history, it is not enough to stop there. The task of theology is not completed when it has simply described God, or even the manner in which God has entered into history creatively and redemptively; it is completed when it calls the church into a proper relationship with God that includes living out the intended consequences of what God has revealed in his biblical script. Theology is thus inherently practical. To the extent that theology is thus consistent with the Bible, it must constantly remember that it was always given in the context of God’s covenantal dealing with man. On this we quote Vos at length:

> The historical character of revelation may be found in its *eminently practical aspect*. The knowledge of God communicated by it is nowhere for purely intellectual purposes. From beginning to end it is knowledge intended to enter into the actual life of man, to be worked out by him in all its practical bearing…God has not revealed himself in a school, but in the covenant; and the covenant as a communion of life is all-comprehensive, embracing all the conditions and interests of those contracting it.\(^{131}\)

Thus, a significant contribution of the DR paradigm is to further demonstrate within the context of a theological methodology that Scripture cannot be simply categorized or cauterized. Rather, it was intended to play a vital role in shaping the way in which people not only believe in God, but also obey God in a vital relationship.\(^{132}\)

In this context, we find Vanhoozer’s “post-propositional” approach to be a fairly provocative, yet innovative theological method that wishes to resist the temptation to reduce the church’s theological approach to the Bible to that of mere information gathering and dissemination. The drama metaphor is employed in a way that attempts to guard both the divine and human role in the development and appropriation of theology. The language of “participation” is key, but it is not intended to suggest that human participation in the divine drama in any way upstages the primacy of God’s speaking and acting. To put it differently, what is suggested here is that the Bible reveals a divinely inspired drama in which the canon of Scripture is the governing script of the dynamic relationship between God and humanity. The biblical drama, as with theology, begins with God and not with man. It is a drama that is first conceived in the mind of God, yet historically speaking, begins at creation and ends at the


\(^{132}\) This is well-captured in the language of Westminster Shorter Catechism, 3. Q. “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” A. “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.”
consummation of the ages.\(^{133}\) It has a particular climax in view—the coming of God in Christ in the fullness of time\(^{134}\) to play his part in the drama of redemption by fulfilling in both word and deed all that is necessary for the salvation of his people, and to also draw them into a renewed story of life that repairs their sin-stained, misguided stories of death.

It is here that the DR paradigm proves to be uniquely compatible with the RH approach to Scripture. In our view it is both important and helpful to view the Bible as revealing one large unfolding drama, with God’s own words and deeds framing both the beginning and the end of the story.\(^{135}\) As Horton puts it, “Like a good play, Scripture possesses a single, unified meaning.”\(^ {136}\) God’s plan to bring Christ into the world in the fullness of time is the over-arching metanarrative that shapes the micro-narratives of the Old and New Testaments. It is a promise that begins in Genesis 3:15 with the *protoeuangelion*, finds its preliminary fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Christ, and is ultimately consummated in the eternal kingdom. Yet all along the way, God is speaking and acting the promises into fulfillment. He continues this ministry of speaking and acting in the fullest sense in the incarnation when the Word is made flesh.\(^ {137}\) Vanhoozer highlights the way in which Christ becoming incarnate is the way in which he dresses for his main performance in history.\(^ {138}\) The church is now clothed in the righteousness of Christ, having put off its garments of sin and shame.\(^ {139}\) It is to continually put on Christ, and being dressed in him, continues to perform the Spirit-inspired script in the world until the curtain closes at the consummation of the ages and we are climactically clothed in righteousness.\(^ {140}\) This dramatic summary of the history of redemption is well captured in the words of Michael Williams:

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133 Vanhoozer recognizes this as a common denominator among “narrative-of-redemption” approaches. “A Drama of Redemption Model,” 158.
134 Galatians 4:4.
137 John 1:14.
139 Colossians 3:9-14.
140 2 Corinthians 5:4.
There is far more to doctrine than simply a propositional content. There is instruction for the acting out of the will and purpose of God as the church lives in the light of the already of the biblical drama of Israel, Jesus, and the birth of the early church, and the not yet of the return of Christ and the coming of the heavenly Jerusalem to earth.\footnote{Vanhoozer’s words, “The drama of redemption ends, as with most comedies, with everyone on stage at a wedding banquet.”\footnote{Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 457.}}

In Vanhoozer’s words, “The drama of redemption ends, as with most comedies, with everyone on stage at a wedding banquet.”\footnote{Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 457.}

Such a comprehensive view of the Bible accounts for both the unity and diversity of the books of the Bible, as well as the various literary genres that comprise it. This emphasis within the DR paradigm (and the overlapping idea of “canonical-linguistic” theology) is what lies at the heart of the RH hermeneutic, as it seeks to do justice to the covenantal unity of Scripture that culminates in the person and work of Christ. At the same time, the RH model recognizes \textit{the importance of history}, and thus does not view the entire Bible as revealing the same thing in the same way. Rather, the Bible is a progressively unfolding message that displays unity on the one hand, and dramatic development on the other. Both the DR and RH paradigms seem concerned with this sensitivity to an over-arching meta-narrative (a redemptive, covenantal drama), while recognizing the way in which the biblical story slowly, progressively develops like scenes in a play. While the two paradigms are distinct from one another, they seem to share overlapping concerns, or common DNA.

3.3 The Drama of Scripture

In this section we would like to develop the idea that viewing the content of Scripture through the lens of drama comports well with the content of Scripture in a variety of ways. We do not intend to suggest by this that Scripture explicitly employs the drama metaphor, but rather that the metaphor seems to do justice to various nuances of Scripture. Numerous authors have attempted to summarize the over-arching content of Scripture as being something like a redemptive drama. N. T. Wright likens the entire Bible to a five-act play or drama.\footnote{N.T. Wright, \textit{How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" Vox Evangelica}, no. 21 (1991): 11. Wright’s use of the drama metaphor is in many ways helpful and illuminating. But to the extent that he uses it to address the question of the Bible’s authority, we find this article vaguely disappointing, in that it seems to reduce the authority of the Bible to the authority of a play in which we are “invited” to participate.} The five acts according to Wright are as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Act 1: Creation (Genesis 1-2)}
  \item \textbf{Act 2: Israel (Exodus 1-24)}
  \item \textbf{Act 3: Jesus (Matthew 1-28)}
  \item \textbf{Act 4: The Church (Acts 1-28)}
  \item \textbf{Act 5: The Return (Revelations 1-22)}
\end{itemize}
Act 1 Creation
Act 2 Fall
Act 3 Israel
Act 4 Jesus
Act 5 Church age

In many respects, Wright’s proposal has served as a reference point for others who have reflected on similar ideas. Other stratifications of the same paradigm have been offered, and Wright’s proposal, though helpful, has been justifiably critiqued. Wells, for instance, sees a weakness in Wright’s suggestion that the church age is the last act and argues instead for the eschaton as the final act. Wells’s suggestion would thus imply six acts in contrast to Wright’s five, as follow:

Act 1 Creation
Act 2 Fall
Act 3 Israel
Act 4 Jesus
Act 5 Church age
Act 7 Eschaton

Stephen Nichols proposes a more simple dramatic structure:

Act 1 Creation
Act 2 Fall
Act 3 Redemption
Act 4 Restoration

By Contrast, Bartholomew and Goheen amplify, rather than shorten Wright’s model by adding to and nuancing it, even beyond that of Wells. Their proposal is as follows:

Act 1 God Establishes his Kingdom: Creation
Act 2 Rebellion in the Kingdom: Fall
Act 3 The King Chooses Israel: Redemption Initiated
   Scene 1 A People for the King
   Scene 2 A Land for His People

Interlude A Kingdom Story Waiting for an Ending: The Inter-testamental Period

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144 Wells, Improvisation, 52.
Act 4  The Coming of the King: Redemption Accomplished
Act 5  Spreading the News of the King: The Mission of the Church
  Scene 1  From Jerusalem to Rome
  Scene 2  And into All the World
Act 6  The Return of the King: Redemption Completed

The nuances contributed by Wells, and especially by Bartholomew and Goheen are important, in that they account for the eschaton as an extension of the Bible’s redemptive drama.\(^{147}\) They also attempt to draw clearer attention to the greater complexity of the various biblical epochs. Thus it would seem that the six-act paradigm seems to do greater justice to the whole of the biblical story over against the four and five-act proposals. As was noted earlier by Vos and others, the Bible is not only “full of dramatic interest,” it is also eschatologically oriented, concluding with a consummate “And they lived happily ever after.” Thus, any stratification of acts that does not account for the eschaton would appear deficient.

On the other side of history (the inception of the drama at creation), it is important to note that the drama of the Bible does not ultimately begin simply with creation, but with the intra-Trinitarian plan of God to accomplish all the things that happen in history. This pre-creation dynamic is often referred to as the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption), and has been argued for and against by theologians from varying angles.\(^{148}\) Of this idea of a stage-setting plan within the Trinity, Kostenberger and Swain suggest:

The *pactum salutis* teaches us that the story which unfolds on the stage of history is the story of an intra-trinitarian fellowship of salvation, a fellowship that reaches back ‘before the world began’ (John 17:5) and that continues even to ‘the hour’ of Jesus’ cross, resurrection and ascension (John 17:1).\(^{149}\)

\(^{147}\) Bartholomew and Goheen also note that Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh were the first to add a sixth act to N.T. Wright’s five act analogy. Cf. Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 182. Ibid., 215.

\(^{148}\) For an excellent introduction to the idea of the covenant of redemption, see David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants” in Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays By the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 167-196. Vos outlines the development of the *pactum salutis* in “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” 245-253. Others have expressed reluctance to referring to an intra-Trinitarian covenant per se. Karl Barth, for instance, rejected the idea on the basis that it created a dualism of wills within the Trinity. Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1 eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010, first published in English by T&T Clark, 1956), 65-66. For a thorough interaction with various reservations about the idea of a *pactum salutis*, see Bertus Loonstra, Verkiezing-Verzoening-Verbond: Beschrijving en beoordeling van de leer van het pactum salutis in de gereformeerde theologie, Ph.D diss., Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht (Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1990), esp. chapters 5, 12.

\(^{149}\) Andreas Kostenberger and Scott Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 170.
If the idea the intra-Trinitarian plan rightly serves as that which occurs before the curtain of history rises, it might be suggested that the Bible’s dramatic structure is as follows:

*Before the Curtain Rises: Trinitarian Plot and Casting of Characters

Act 1  Creation
   Scene 1 Creation in General
   Scene 2 The Creation of Man in detail
Act 2  Life in Paradise to Paradise Lost
   Scene 1 Before the Fall
   Scene 2 After the Fall
Act 3  From Patriarchs to the Exodus
Act 4  Life in the Land to the Loss of the Land
   Scene 1 Conquest and Dominion
   Scene 2 Covenant Failure and Expulsion

*Interlude:  Stage-Setting During the Inter-Testamental Period

Act 5  Jesus—the Denouement of History
   Scene 1 Birth to Baptism
   Scene 2 Baptism to Cross
   Scene 3 Resurrection to Ascension
Act 6  Church Age
   Scene 1 From Jerusalem to Rome
   Scene 2 From Rome to the Ends of the World
Act 7  The Eschaton
   Scene 1 The Return of the King
   Scene 2 Victory and Final Judgment

*Standing Ovation: The Eternal Celebration of the Glorified King and His Kingdom

This proposed stratification is simply a creative suggestion for applying the drama metaphor to the major epochs of Scripture. We would highlight again that while the drama metaphor is only that—a metaphor—the scenes of the biblical drama unfold on various stages, each of which occurs in particular historical contexts. Related to this, each covenantal administration that occurs in history (and thus each scene within the drama of redemption) is effectively an outworking of the covenant which occurs “before the curtain rises” in the eternal plan of the Triune God.\(^{150}\) This is true not simply from the perspective of God’s ordaining all

things that come to pass, but in particular of the work of Christ that is described as fulfilling all that the Father sent him to do.\textsuperscript{152}

In addition, to the extent that drama is both speaking and acting for the purpose of displaying the realities of life, an analogy can be seen in the word and deed nature of biblical revelation. The Bible clearly depicts God as both speaking and acting. As noted previously, God’s speaking and acting are the very foundation of revelation itself. Creation is capable of being described in dramatic terms as it is brought about by God’s speech-acts, and all of creation continues to testify to its subordinate role to the one whose glory is revealed in every dramatic detail.\textsuperscript{153} In addition, Adam was created in the \textit{imago Dei} in such a way that we might appropriately say that all that he was created to do was to be a spirited, creative mimicking of God’s knowledge, righteousness, holiness and dominion over the creatures.\textsuperscript{154} After the fall, a heroic drama ensues in which God reveals himself as the divine rescuer, who enters upon the stage of redemptive history to speak and act on behalf of his people. What God does in the history of Israel is nothing less than a display of his power and glory, not only before his people Israel, but also before his enemies. This display is but a preview of the coming of God in Christ Jesus, the epicenter of redemptive history.\textsuperscript{155}

It is in the coming of Christ that we find the drama of God’s redemption reaching its climactic expression.\textsuperscript{156} God comes, clothed in the frail garments of humanity,\textsuperscript{157} intent upon perfectly performing every word of God’s inspired script (the law) and enduring the fullness of the wages of our sin—the tragic death of a martyr. As Ryken has pointed out, the gospel may be compared to a U-shaped comedy, in which the narrative moves through various, successive stages, the mission itself seeming at a moment to be severely threatened, if not thwarted, by the

\textsuperscript{151} Ephesians 1:11; Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.
\textsuperscript{152} John 17:3; Hebrews 10:5-10.
\textsuperscript{153} Psalm 19 makes us think along these lines.
\textsuperscript{154} Westminster Shorter Catechism, 10.
\textsuperscript{155} N.T. Wright sees this as the heart of Christ’s prophetic ministry—retelling the story of Israel with himself at its center. \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 199. We shall address the topic of typology in a subsequent section.
\textsuperscript{157} We do not mean in a way to imply a docetic view of the incarnation. Christ was, we believe, fully God and fully man, yet without sin. Still, in the incarnation the eternal Word \textit{became} flesh. As Vanhoozer notes, “The Son is the principal actor: God became fully man, and hence historical, on the world stage.” \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 106.
death of Christ. Yet God, in his irrepressible power, overcomes his and his people’s enemy through his triumph over death itself in the resurrection. The U is completed as he who has come from the eternal glory of his Father in heaven, returns there, and does so climactically with his rescued bride at his side, there to join him in the eternal bliss of life in communion with the triune God.\(^{159}\)

In this context, it is provocative to think about the ministry of Jesus and his relationship to the Old Testament. Though not drama in the technical sense, Jesus appears to fulfill his ministry in fairly dramatic ways. The signs that he performed were often done as a means to synthesize the relationship between the words and works of God. So, for instance, in John 6 Jesus not only proclaims the “bread of life” message, he also dramatically provided bread for the people, and refers to himself as the “true bread” that has come down from heaven. Vos has rightly pointed out that often, when Jesus uses the adjective “true” (\(\alpha ληθν\)), as in John 6:32, Jesus is not contrasting that which is true with that which is false, but is rather contrasting that which is true with that which was temporary, typological and provisional.\(^{160}\) God had given the people bread to eat in the wilderness. It was not false bread, but bread that symbolized the coming of the one who would enter the world and offer his body and blood for the life of his people. Jesus is that true bread, and thus his body is “true food” and his blood “true drink” (John 6:55).

Jesus also spoke in parables. Parables, unlike other forms of teaching, make a point by telling a story into which the reader or listener is called to imaginatively participate. Kenneth Bailey makes the point well in saying:

A Parable is not a delivery system for an idea. It is not like a shell casing that can be discarded once the idea (the shell) is fired. Rather, a parable is a house in which the reader or listener is invited to take up residence. The reader is encouraged to look out on the world from the point of view of the story.\(^{161}\)

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\(^{159}\) Michael Reeves, Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 94.


The stories Jesus told, whether actual or parabolic, were always designed to draw the listener into the drama of the story as an empathizing participant. The story became not simply a story but their story. In this respect, Jesus continues the long line of Old Testament revelation that often invoked dramatic actions of word and deed as a means of cultivating a sense of continuity between the past and the present participants—they were a part of the same story. This idea could be illustrated from a number of Old Testament rituals.

Circumcision was not simply a sign of the covenant in a general sense, but a perpetual reminder that God had made a covenant promise to Abraham and to his descendants (Genesis 17:7). Two chapters earlier God both made and confirmed promises to Abraham through what he said and by his passing through the animals that were symbolically torn in half. The fact that God passed through the animals rather than Abraham signified that it would ultimately be God himself (not Abraham) who would lay down his life for the satisfaction of the covenant promise. Word and deed were dramatically bound to one another and reinforced one another. What the word said, the sign showed.\(^{162}\) Thus, God “swore by himself” (Hebrews 6:13) and confirmed the promise to Abraham and his children by oath. The rite of circumcision created transgenerational continuity within the covenant community, so that the recipient could effectively say, Abraham’s story is my story. Galatians 3:29 thus affirms that believers are Abraham’s children—participating in the same promise through faith and union with Christ (Galatians 3:26).

The Passover displayed the realities of the covenant in both word and deed. As often as it was celebrated, it was to remind the people of Israel, whether young or old, that they too had been brought out of the bondage of Egypt by the power of God who passed by them in judgment when he struck down the enemies of his people.\(^{163}\) The implication is that the Passover was to create a sense of solidarity between the past and the present, one generation and another (Exodus 12:26-27). The participant was to think of it not simply as a story, but their story. The language of “participation” is used in connection with the Passover and the Lord’s Supper (the New Testament counterpart to the Passover). One who partakes in the covenant meal by faith is participating in the blood of the lamb or the blood of Christ, as it were (1 Corinthians 10:16).

\(^{162}\) HC 66; WCF 27:1-3.
\(^{163}\) Horton, People and Place, 106.
The ritual meals create solidarity with something in the past, while perpetuating that experience in the life and faith of the participant in the present.164

Joshua 4 offers a similarly intriguing example of this. The Israelites were told to take up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan river as they were passing through, and to set them up on the other side as a memorial to what God had done in delivering and preserving them. Yet the memorializing of the event was not simply for that generation. So the text of Joshua 4:21-24 reads:

> And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

Of particular interest is the fact that the text states that the stones are there to show “you” what the LORD did for “you.” Future participating generations were not to think of the memorial as simply a reminder of what God did for the prior generation who actually passed through the Jordon, but rather to think of it as though God had actually done it for them—as though they were the very ones who passed through the Jordon. They were not simply rehearsing a story, but their story. They were to find their life in the story, and then continue to live in the light of that story. Many other features of Israel’s worship and rituals operate on a similar level. They called the people of God to dramatically embody the events of the past in a way that recreated the stage upon which those events first took place. But now they were the participants in the story, and thus the redemptive-plot was perpetuated in and through them.

In the Old Testament, prophets were frequently called upon to perform various theatrical displays before the people of Israel as a means of communicating a scripted message. Ezekiel is commanded by God to perform several oddly dramatic spectacles before Israel, culminating in chapter 12 in which it is made clear that his actions were signs of what God was about to do for Israel (Ezekiel 12:11). Hosea is commanded to marry a prostitute and to have children by her in order to show the nation not only what they had become, but even more importantly, how God’s grace would triumph over their sin and judgment. Isaiah’s three years of nakedness were to be a sign of God’s judgment through famine (Isaiah 20:1-6). Ryken refers to Jeremiah as the

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master of such “street theater” for his many performances (Jeremiah 13:1-7; 17:19-27; 19, 27; 32:1-25; 51:59-64). These peculiar Old Testament episodes of dramatic activity were employed by God as a means of acting out either what the people had done or what God himself would do.

It is important to note that by the time of the New Testament, generally speaking, the Greek theater was a thing of the past. That does not mean that New Testament authors were unfamiliar with theatrical plays or comedies, as is evidenced by occasional quotations or allusions to such plays, such as Paul’s quotation of Menander’s play, *Thais*, in 1 Corinthians 15:33. The New Testament employs terms that bear theatrical connotations. In particular, the use of the terms such as theater (θέατρον), mimic (μιμήσις), and hypocrite (ὑποκριτής), had a back-drop in theatrical contexts, though by the time of the New Testament, they were employed in notably different and nuanced ways. Paul’s use of θέατρον in 1 Cor. 4:9 is worth considering. “For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle (θέατρον) to the world, to angels, and to men.”

The apostles are viewed here as a spectacle on display before the world, angels, and men. Hansulf Bloedhorn says of the term theater (θέατρον) used here, “Later documents attest to the use of *theatron* as a term for the artistic practice of role-playing before spectators, i.e. for theatrical performance as such and its organization (1 Cor. 4:9).” Hodge views this use of theater (θέατρον) as functioning metonymically, and comments, “Such were the sufferings of the apostles that men and angels gazed on them with wonder, as people gaze on a spectacle in a theater.”

Kistemaker suggests that Paul’s use of term here likely reflects on the scene in Acts 19:29-31, where Gaius and Aristarchus were dragged into the theater to be spectacles to the

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167 Menander would be categorized as “new comedy” for its focus on the realities of everyday life, and predictable ‘stock’ characters. For the distinctions between old and new comedy, see Eric Dugdale, *Greek Theatre in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11-18. The behavior of characters displayed in plays like that of Menander were designed to draw attention to what was socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Ibid., 157.
168 Referring to Heb. 10:33 and 1 Cor. 4:9 “In both of these passages the emphasis is on how the persecution of believers make them a show or a theater of faith, to the world and to angels.” Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman III, eds. “Theater” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 856-857.
169 On the idea of ‘angels as audience’ see Hebrews 13:1 and 1 Peter 1:12.
crowd, a regrettable fate sometimes experienced by criminals.\textsuperscript{172} He further notes, “Anyone and everyone could be present to watch the execution of slaves and criminals. Paul’s statement that he is a spectacle to the world, therefore, is no exaggeration.”\textsuperscript{173} According to Thiselton, the pastoral implication of this should have had a humbling effect upon the Corinthians, who were safely postured as mere spectators to Paul and the apostle’s sufferings, yet called by Paul to imitate him in his sufferings for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16).\textsuperscript{174}

In Hebrews 10:32-33, the church as a whole is viewed in a similar light, as becoming a spectacle of shameful martyrdom. “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed (\(\theta\epsilon\alpha\tau\rho\iota\zeta\omicron\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\)) to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.” In this context, \(\theta\epsilon\alpha\tau\rho\iota\zeta\omicron\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\) ought to be defined as “To cause someone to be publicly exposed as an object of shame or disgrace.”\textsuperscript{175} The idea of shame is significant here. Shame was something that the converts to Christianity would have undoubtedly experienced, whether they were Jewish or gentile. This shame was not simply familial, nor was it in any way tame. The author of Hebrews seems to be making the point that the shame experienced by the congregation was both public and harsh.

However, to the extent that they experienced such shame, not only were they identifying with one another, and participating in the sufferings of one another; even more so, they were identifying with and participating in the sufferings and shame of Christ himself (Hebrews 13:12-13). As Croy notes, “The same shame was encountered but disdained by Jesus.”\textsuperscript{176} Cockerill says that this language of “being partners” with those who are suffering parallels the work of Christ described in Hebrews 2:14, where Christ becomes man in order that he might share in our suffering.\textsuperscript{177} An interesting suggestion is made by Jones, who suggests that as soon as these

\textsuperscript{172} See \textit{TDNT}, III, 42 for a helpful discussion of the correspondence between the NT use of \(\theta\epsilon\alpha\tau\rho\omicron\nu\) and its cognates.
\textsuperscript{173} Simon Kistemaker, \textit{1 Corinthians} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 139.
\textsuperscript{174} Anthony Thiselton, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 360. F. W. Grosheide notes that these living theaters of martyrdom and suffering commonly took place for the sake of amusing spectators \textit{De eerste brief aan de kerk te Korinthe} (Kampen: Kok, 1957), 128.
\textsuperscript{175} Louis and Nida, 25.201, pg. 311. Luke Johnson notes that the term \(\theta\epsilon\alpha\tau\rho\iota\zeta\omicron\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\) is a \textit{hapax legomenon} in the New Testament. Luke Timothy Johnson, \textit{Hebrews: A Commentary} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 269. \(\theta\epsilon\alpha\tau\rho\iota\zeta\omicron\omicron\) occurs outside the New Testament according to BAGD, 353.
early converts were baptized they were immediately exposed to trials and temptations. This would make for a provocative and interesting parallel with not only Jesus, who was likewise tempted and tried immediately following his own baptism (Matthew 3:4), but also with the nation of Israel, who was led into the wilderness to be tested and tried immediately following her “baptism” (I Corinthians 10:2) in the Red Sea. It is possible that the author of Hebrews similarly intends for these redemptive-historical parallels to serve as a form of pastoral comfort illustrating their union with Christ and the Old Testament people of God.

O’Brien notes the way in which this theatrical language of shame was figuratively used to describe someone who was made a spectacle or held up to public derision. Johnson highlights the intended negative (humiliating) connotation of this language in the fact that Christians were being treated like the publically scorned actors who were not well thought of during this stage of antiquity. Of this he says,

Given the low repute of actors in the honor-shame calculus of antiquity, and given the involuntary nature of ‘being put on display’ suggested by the passive form of the verb, we are justified in reading the display as a sort of shaming.

It is quite remarkable, as Moffat notes, that in spite of the fact that this early congregation was exposed to such humiliating public shame, they abandoned neither their confession nor one another. To the contrary, they bore one another’s burdens (10:33) and exemplified an interest in one another’s sufferings in a way that had become a marvelous display of grace, perseverance, and love. This is the paradoxical theater of martyrdom that was witnessed by antiquity on the stage of redemptive history. Phillips puts it well.

178 Hywel Jones, *Let’s Study Hebrews* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 178. John Brown makes the same observation, and includes that often it was the case that those sent to such “theaters” were often forced to fight with one another or against wild animals for the sake of entertaining those who looked on. John Brown, *Hebrews* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 480. If we adopt an early dating for Hebrews, Brown’s suggestion would be pressing the language too literally.

179 P.T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 384. Bruce provides an interesting discussion of the various ways in which this language could have been applied to Christians more likely before, than after A.D. 65, when the a large-scale persecution of Christians broke out. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 267-270. His citations from antiquity would seem to support the idea of a pre-65 date for the book of Hebrews. Ellingworth notes that the reference is too vague to be emphatically attached to the persecution of Nero. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 547. For support of the same, see James Moffat, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 153.


by saying, “This was the display of faith by which Christians turned the ancient world upside down.”

Thus, the author of Hebrews, while exhorting the congregation to continue on in faithful perseverance, also compliments them on their “past performance” of faithfulness under pressure. Lane notes that the way in which being publicly martyred (the idea behind θεατριζόμενοι) “vividly expresses the public abuse and shame to which the members of the congregation had been exposed.” This language was used not only of Christians, but also of the Jews in general in regard to much of the suffering they had experienced. Philo has an interesting, extra-biblical use of this vocabulary, employing both “theater” (θεατρον) and “mimicking” (μιμόμαται) to describe the way in which early non-Christian Jewish martyrs identified with the martyrdom of their faithful Jewish ancestors by becoming a living theatre of religious martyrdom. However, Hughes notes that the persecution in view in Hebrews is distinctively anti-Christian and not anti-Semitic. Van Bruggen connects the language to the martyrdom that the newly converted Jews to Christianity would have experienced as a result of their conversion. While this is plausible, it is difficult in our opinion to ascertain with certainty whether or not the persecution in view was something that came from the Jews or from the imperial gentile authorities (i.e. Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49). The latter seems more likely in our view, as the Jews rarely had the power to effect such public scenes as Hebrews (and Acts) seem to describe. Nevertheless, Van Bruggen is right in noting that the members of the congregation were effectively considered to be “godslasteraars” (blasphemers) in the eyes of their hostile persecutors, whether Jew or Gentile. By their confession of faith, they became participants in a theater of martyrdom.

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184 Donald Hagner, Encountering the Book of Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 171.
185 Lane, Hebrews 9-13 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 299. For similar support of this idea, see Van Bruggen’s comments in H.R. Van de Kamp Hebreeën: Geloven is volhouden (Kampen: Kok, 2010), 263.
187 Philip Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 428.
188 Van Bruggen, in Van de Kamp, Hebreeën, 263.
189 Ibid., 263.
In a similar vein, the language of “imitation” (μητηται) is suggestively a summons to act in a way that reflects the prior performance of another. In secular parlance, it was sometimes connected to art or drama, where copying an original specimen was the goal. According to Michaelis, the noun μητηται means “above all the actor, the mime.” Mimes often imitated the scenes of daily life, and were a living display of the realities around them, both good and bad. In the theaters of antiquity, actors imitated persons from real life or other actors, and thus gave a “fitting” performance of their part in the drama. Paul uses similar language as he commands the church to imitate himself (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1), imitate God (Ephesians 5:1), be imitators of the apostles “and of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:6), and even of “the churches” (1 Thessalonians 6:12). With this language, Paul appears to be summoning the church to remember the parts played by those who have gone before them as live performers on stage in the living-theater of God’s redemption, whether those actors are Old Testament saints, apostles, other Christians—or especially Jesus, and through faith and obedience to imitate them. In doing so, Paul does not abstract these street-performers from their redemptive-historical context or from the community of which they are part—the church.

Consistent with the discussion above regarding the idea of “being publicly exposed” (θατριζομενοι) in Hebrews 10:33 is the use of μητηται (imitators) in Hebrews 6:12 “…so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” In context, the author of Hebrews reminds the congregation of their love and service toward the saints, and pleads with them to remain steadfast so that through “faith and patience” they might inherit the promises, and in doing so, “imitate” those who have done the same. We find this language to be similar to the usage of μητηται (to imitate) outside the New Testament.

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190 *TDNT*, IV, 660 n 2.
191 Ibid., 660. Similarly, William D. Furley defines ‘mimos’ as “In the first place the actor in the popular theatre, the play itself in which he—alone or with a small number of others—portrays human types by words and gesture.” *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 921.
192 Max Harris, *Theater and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 53; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 252-263.
193 *TDNT* confirms that this is a frequent feature of Paul’s preaching. *TDNT*, VI, 667. Cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:7 where this seems to be a standard expectation.
194 Cf. Hebrews 6:12, and especially Hebrews 11.
195 Emphasis added.
Testament. Michaelis’s comments on the use of μιμήται (imitators) in Hebrews are apt as he suggests, “It is a summons to keep the faith in one’s own life and death.”196 In the context of Hebrews, this means imitating those who, by faith and perseverance, inherit the promises. Thus, in a way similar to dramatic usage, the idea of imitation can be suggested as a pastorally effective heuristic device.197 A faithful mimicking is called for as those who endure a variety of trials for the faith do so against the backdrop of others who have performed similar roles. This language in Hebrews 6:12 likely anticipates the argument of Hebrews 11, which we will develop in chapter 5.

Finally, the term ὑποκρίτης, from which the word “hypocrite” is derived, has antecedents in the realm of acting, yet by the time it came into use in biblical parlance it bore a consistently negative connotation.198 It is likely that the term originally had something of a more neutral meaning, suggesting that the one doing the acting was simply interpreting an event, story, etc.199 The biblical usage bears a decidedly negative connotation, implying that the hypocrite (ὑποκριτῆς) was deceitfully proclaiming something that he or she was not in reality embodying themselves. Thus, their message was false.200 It needs to be highlighted that these terms that have been discussed, though appearing to have theatrical connotations, were ultimately borrowed from the everyday life and culture with which the various New Testament congregations would have been familiar in one fashion or another. The usage of these terms does not imply that the New Testament authors were thinking in self-consciously dramatic terms. They do, however, support the idea that the world of the New Testament overlapped a culture that was familiar with plays, comedies and public spectacles. It is this last category that most likely informs the New Testament usage of theatrical terms. Though not a drama per se, the Christian church was a spectacle before a watching world. It was called to mimic those who had been faithful, and to avoid those who hypocritically wore the mask of religion while denying its reality in Christ.

196 TDNT, VI, 666.
197 Again, we are not insisting that the New Testament vocabulary here is explicitly dramatic, but that it comports well with the heuristic function of the drama metaphor.
198 TDNT, VIII, 566.
199 “In Attic, then, the ὑποκρίνομαι means “to act.” The actor’s job is to present the drama assigned to him by artistic reciting accompanied by mime and gestures…” TDNT, VIII, 560.
200 Of the eighteen times the word is used in the New Testament, not a single one of them is neutral, let alone positive. See also L&N, 766; BAGD, 845 for the same definition, each of which see the idea of “acting” as prominent.
In summary of this section, we hope to have shown that the drama metaphor, while not explicitly biblical, none-the-less appears to have biblical analogies and can, in a guarded way, serve an illustrative purpose. Thus, it seems fitting and pastorally helpful to employ the DR paradigm as a heuristic device for communicating biblical truth. To view and describe (hence preach) through the lens of a dramatic metaphor seems consistent with those like Vos who view the Bible as being “full of dramatic interest.”

To read the story is to live the story. To preach the story is to not simply tell the story of redemption, but to draw hearers into that story as faithful participants. Subsequent chapters will afford us the opportunity to apply the drama metaphor more precisely, especially as it relates to preaching. But before doing that, we would like to briefly review the use of the drama metaphor in church history. Simply put, our goal in the next section is to illustrate the use of the drama metaphor by a few key theologians, and to objectively acknowledge the love-hate relationship the church seems to have with the idea of drama in theological parlance.

3.4 Historical Use of the Drama Metaphor

The language of theater as a means of communicating and illustrating theology is foreign neither to the history of the church, nor to key Reformed theologians. It is well recognized that the church has had a love-hate relationship with the theatre. Harris notes that Augustine, following Plato, compared the theatre to a plague, and that the early church often embodied this disdain for the theater. Von Balthasar puts it even more pointedly, saying that Augustine “saw the struggle between the church and the theatre as an allusion to the great conflict between the two principles of world history, that is, the City of God and the secular state.”

Yet whereas many in the early church found the theater difficult to embrace and shunned it, Calvin seems to have found in it a redeemable means by which to describe God’s work in creation and occasionally in the church.

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201 Vos, Biblical Theology, 17.
202 Harris, Theater and Incarnation, 69-70.
204 We want to avoid overstating this idea. It would be anachronistic to say that Calvin employed the DR paradigm. Our goal is to simply illustrate that the drama metaphor has been employed at least in isolated or incidental contexts within the Reformed tradition.
Calvin employed the theater metaphor frequently in describing the created order as the “theater of God’s Glory.” He also referred to the world as a “glorious theater,” “most beautiful theater,” and “this magnificent theater of heaven and earth replenished with numberless wonders.” In Book One of his Institutes he states, “For our salvation was a matter of concern to God in such a way that, not forgetful of himself, he kept his glory primarily in view, and therefore, created the whole world for this end, that it may be a theater for his glory.” This theater language was part of his apologetic method, arguing that every human that God has made is surrounded by the theatrical display of God’s glory in creation. Yet, for Calvin, sin has so affected humanity that much of the play is lost upon us apart from God’s redemptive plan to restore our ability to perceive more clearly God’s glory in creation and in the church. Though Calvin’s “theater” vocabulary predominantly occurs in the context of viewing the created order as a theatrical venue, there are rare occurrences that suggest that he considered the church’s worship as a divinely directed theater within the larger world-theater of God’s glory.

Thus, in discussing the way in which we are to receive the grace of Christ, Calvin rejects the idea of venerating saints or appealing to them as intercessors. Rather, Calvin sees the saints as onlookers or spectators watching the drama of our redemption in history. He says, “Consequently, they attend sacred assemblies, and the church is for them a theater in which they marvel at the varied and manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10).” In a similar fashion, Calvin describes the church as a sacred theater of which the angels are spectators. In his comments on Psalm 138: 1 he says:

The solemn assembly is, so to speak, a heavenly theater, graced by the presence of attending angels; and one reason why the cherubim overshadowed the ark of the covenant was to let God’s people know that the angels are present when they come to worship in the sanctuary.
To view the Bible as revealing a multi-faceted drama with God’s kingdom as the metanarrative is not overly innovative, nor particularly contrary to RH hermeneutics. As noted above, Geerhardus Vos described the Bible as being “full of dramatic interest.”\(^\text{213}\) In many ways, his RH hermeneutical approach to the Bible is an implementation of the drama idea. To say it differently, for Vos, the real drama of the Bible is bound to the covenant itself. It is God’s slowly unfolding plan to redeem lost sinners from their destruction-bent courses. The plan unfolds like a dramatic story in which the plot is slowly developed, the characters slowly yet punctually introduced, and the climax of the story—God’s coming in Christ—happens at just the right time. This is the climactic emphasis of Galatians 4:4; history is seen as being pregnant, virtually bursting with climactic readiness for the coming of the Son of God into history to do for humanity what it could not do for itself—namely, reverse the curse brought about by sin.

Schilder clearly sees the idea of drama in the incarnation of Christ and his redemptive work.\(^\text{214}\) Regarding the humanity of Christ, he says:

> ‘True man’ signifies thus: genuine man. Not half-man, not almost-man, not sublimated man, not man in a different history, a so-called ‘higher’ [man], not man-like, but a real man, able to act with and in a drama, which falls within the same framework of time and space as [that] in which Adam and we had and have our own drama.\(^\text{215}\)

Vos’s metaphor in which he develops the coming of Christ into the world as that of a seed slowly developing into a rose seems to aptly parallel the drama metaphor. Just as a seed naturally and organically develops, so also does a good dramatic plot. Each successive scene is built upon the prior scene. It is neither a mere replay of the former scene, nor is it a plot-spoiler that gives away all of the climactic details to be revealed later at the perfect time. Yet when the climax of the plot happens, and the success of the drama’s hero is revealed, then, and only then, do all the previous details make sense. Just as with watching a movie a second time, knowing the ending helps to explain many of the confusing, loose details that appeared to be disconnected or unrelated. The same is true with the Bible, especially as understood through an RH lens.

There is a real sense in which Christians learn to read their Bible backwards, allowing the end of

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\(^{213}\) Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 17.

\(^{214}\) Trimp, *Heils geschiedenis en Prediking*, 61.

the story to explain and clarify the details that were introduced and slowly developed.\(^{216}\) The Bible reveals a well-developed drama, and not a detail of it is wasted. But many of the details cannot be properly understood apart from seeing how the story ends—how the drama comes to its own climactic finish. In this sense, we agree with and are greatly helped by Vos’s famous line, “eschatology precedes soteriology.”\(^{217}\) In the context of our current reflection, we infer from this that the unfolding drama of the Bible (soteriology) is informed by its dramatic climax (eschatology). The latter interprets the former, but the former brings the latter about. The goal of revelation is the consummation of the covenant, just as the goal of every dramatic rescue is the wonderful relationship that seems to emerge at the end of the story. As Webster puts it, “Biblical theology is a kind of anatomy of the historical unfolding of God’s dealings with creatures, a rendering of the temporal work of God.”\(^{218}\) This is what the Bible reveals and in this sense, the Bible truly is “full of dramatic interest.” Kline says, “All Scripture is covenantal, and the canonicity of all the Scripture is covenantal. Biblical canon is covenantal canon.”\(^{219}\) The canon is shaped by the drama of the covenant.

In more recent decades since the time of Vos, the idea of drama has become a point of real interest. Beyond the authors we have introduced as primary for our purposes, it is important to recognize the vital work of theologians such as Von Balthasar. He is arguably a significant author upon whom both Vanhoozer and Horton lean, and with whom both of them frequently interact. In the words of Wells, “The theologian who has given the most consideration to the notion of theology as drama is Hans Urs van Balthasar.”\(^{220}\) His five-volume Theo-Drama is a seminal work on the interaction between drama and theological endeavor. Intensely important in his project is the idea of drama being the performance of theology. Thus he says, “Performance requires that one come up with a unified vision embracing both the drama (with the author’s entire creative contribution) and the art of the actors (with their very different creative

\(^{216}\) Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 159.

\(^{217}\) Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, 60. And similarly, “The New Testament writers in their attempt to grasp the content of the Christian salvation make the future the interpreter of the present, eschatology the norm and example of the soteriological experience.” Geerhardus Vos, “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit” in *Biblical and Theological Studies by the Members and the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 212.


\(^{219}\) Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 75.

abilities).”

The recognition of the author’s creative intention in the script is key; but the importance of the creative performance of the script is also key. This language seems to lend itself well to the nuances we find in Vanhoozer and Horton. It is important to underscore the simplicity of this nuance of drama as the performance of the biblical script. We would concur with Van Balthasar in saying “Drama means action.” Thus, the church’s enterprise of theological formation and communication is entirely dramatic for Von Balthasar. Dogmatic theology, in his view is “dramatic at its core.”

Additionally, Von Balthasar sees the Bible itself as unfolding a theocentric drama. In his view, what is unique about the Bible is that it is “the testimony of Scriptures, which asserts the uniqueness of the drama enacted by God with his creation.” He views the Bible as not simply a stale, passive record of what God has done, but a living, active participant in the drama of God’s redemption. Jesus Christ is seen as the hermeneutical key that explains both the Old and New Testament. In addition, he views Jesus as being “God’s interpretation of himself in history.” Finally, he notes how too often in theology the focus tends to be upon the work of Christ, to the exclusion of the work of the Father and the Spirit. For Von Balthasar, the climax of the covenant drama is emphatically bound to the Triune God whose purpose in history was to stage the redemption of people who would later enjoy eternal life. In his own words, “The Son brings his mission to a close at the point where everything enters into the Triune life.”

Added to the important, voluminous contributions of Von Balthasar is the pithy work of Dorothy Sayers. If the former might be likened to a wieldy battle-axe of theo-dramatic vocabulary, the latter is a sharp little dagger. Sayers’ single volume, Creed or Chaos, referenced in numerous books (including the works of Horton and Vanhoozer), articulates something along the DR line of thought. Creed or Chaos is not simply insightful; it is piercingly provocative.

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222 Ibid., 451.
226 Ibid., 91.
227 Ibid., 91. In a similar light, Hans Burger suggests, “Although Father, Son and Spirit as three divine actors are all mentioned, Jesus Christ has the central position.” Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 256.
229 Ibid., 521.
Sayers is well-known for her juxtaposition of drama and dogma. In her words, “It is the neglect of drama that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama ever staggered in the imagination of man—and the dogma is in the drama.”

Significant to her articulation of this theological drama is the overwhelming way in which God is not simply the central actor in the drama, but that he becomes the paradoxical victim and hero. Sayers finds this to be the most confrontational truth of Christianity, and she seems almost offended by any means of communicating this theo-drama in dispassionate ways that fail to do justice to the fascinating drama of God’s redemption in Christ. So she says:

So this is the outline of the official story—the tale of the time when God was the under-dog and got beaten, when He submitted to the conditions He had laid down and became a man like the men He had made, and the men He had made broke Him and killed Him. This is the dogma we find so dull, this terrifying drama of which God is the victim and the hero.

She has stale preaching and dry orthodoxy in mind when she pointedly says, “Let us, in Heaven’s name, drag out the Divine Drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set it on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction.”

We cannot help but appreciate her rattling tone. Her words seem to capture a sentiment that we find important to authors such as Horton and Vanhoozer—the idea of the Bible’s drama being full of life and intended to be both lived and communicated in a creative, passionate way that befits the glory of the divine drama itself. Her pointed remarks to preachers are as unsettling as they are challenging. With a sheer lack of inhibition she says, “If Christian ministers really believe it [the dogma they preach] is only an intellectual game for theologians and has no bearing upon human life, it is no wonder that their congregations are ignorant, bored and bewildered.”

More recent authors such as N.T. Wright have found a place for the drama vocabulary as a means of communicating the nature of the Bible’s authority. We quote him at length:

The authority of the Bible is the authority of a love story in which we are invited to take part. It is, in that sense, more like the ‘authority’ of a dance in which we are invited to join; or a novel in which, the scene is set, the plot well developed, and the ending planned and in sight, there is still some way to God, and we are invited to become living, participating, intelligent, and decision-making characters in the story as it moves toward its destination.

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231 Ibid., 5.
232 Ibid., 24.
233 Ibid., 31.
It is appropriate at this point in which we are reviewing the historical development of the drama metaphor within the context of the church to briefly mention something about the move from modernism to postmodernism. This is important because if it were not for the hermeneutical, epistemological and theological conundrums and contributions articulated within strains of postmodernism, it is arguable that many of our primary authors (Horton, Vanhoozer, etc.) would not be engaged in their current work. In other words, it is largely against the backdrop of postmodernism, in particular, that the DR rhetoric has been developed. Thus, postmodernism is the contemporary context in which the DR metaphor has come to thrive. To fail to recognize the distinct context of postmodernism will inevitably lead to devaluing the significance of the DR metaphor, especially as it relates to preaching.

In contrast to modern and subsequent postmodern theological trends that effectively reduced the narrative of Scripture to a religious history of human invention without any certain divine authorship or authority,235 the DR paradigm is self-consciously advocating a view that returns God to the place of being the one whose authoritative words and redemptive deeds occupy center stage in history.236 In this sense, the DR paradigm serves an apologetic purpose, in that it argues for both the integrity and continuity of the Bible from a canonical point of view.237 Boersma summarizes Vanhoozer’s goal well by saying, “In short, Vanhoozer wishes to recover the role of the imagination over against a stale propositionalism and at the same time, wants us to hold firmly to the canon as the regulative principle that guides our interpretation.”238 This can be illustrated through several recent historical examples that help form the backdrop both of postmodernism and more importantly, the DR paradigm.

The historical-critical movement that once dominated the landscape of biblical criticism was, in many respects, very modern (in the sense of pre-dating the advent of postmodernism),

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235 De Ruijter, *Horen naar de stem van God*, 69. Goldsworthy describes the movement saying, “Postmodernism…grows out of the philosophy of the death of God. It is a form of literary atheism that cannot accept that the author’s intention is recoverable. The death of the author means of course the death of both the divine and human authors.” Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible*, 68.
236 This, again, is the distinct move from the ‘cultural-linguistic’ turn of postmodernism back to a ‘canonical-linguistic’ approach to Scripture and its norms.
237 “A Canonical center is an attempt to articulate a unified story.” Randal Pelton, *Preaching with Accuracy*, 122.
but has waned in recent decades. Critics of the movement, both inside and outside the conservative, evangelical world, have recognized that advocates of the historical-critical movement were no less free from theological presuppositions and circular reasoning than those advocating biblical inerrancy. Suspicious of even modern secular presuppositions, Ricoeur asks, “Who interprets? The theologian or the philosopher? The preacher or is it already the exegete? Without a doubt there is no such thing as an innocent interpretation.” Furthermore, postmodernism’s utter recalcitrance toward propositional theology has ironically criticized even the field of biblical criticism, effectively finding itself adrift on a sea of intellectual skepticism—a skepticism that has subsequently felt a giant void. Negative aspects of Enlightenment thinking have had the effect of opening a drain in the bottom of a bathtub. A downward spiral has begun, leaving a vacuum of intellectual doubt, and those doubts have implied changes in the theological method for Bible-believing evangelicals as well as skeptics. Williams summarizes this well:

Change is coming to evangelical theology as evangelicals are beginning to recognize something of the validity of the postmodern critique of enlightenment rationalism, its ghettoization of the knowing subject and the production of an epistemology that often is more of an impediment to knowing than either a servant to or explanation of knowing. We are finally beginning to get it: what one sees is a product of who one is and where one stands in relation to reality.

Older, modernistic hermeneutical methods that attempted to embrace the higher critical approaches to the Bible while still allowing for some form of quasi-pietistic biblical “application” have only enlarged the gap between the Bible and the reader. Lessing’s ditch

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239 For example, “Schleiermacher realized that we today cannot understand the ancient biblical texts simply by using the objective methods of literary and historical criticism.” Braaten and Jenson, *A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology: Reading from Karl Barth to Radical Pluralism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 115.


241 Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 139.

242 This is well illustrated by Charles Bartow. “How is the word of God known here at the end of the 20th century? Who gets to name God? Can human beings speak for God? How can we distinguish between our wishful thinking about God and legitimate construals? What will prevent us from confusing God’s word of comfort with our own idolatrous longings? Does anybody believe anymore that this is remotely possible? Does God still speak?” Charles L. Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), xii.


245 Gadamer discusses the difficulty of presuppositions in modern theologians such as Bultmann and Schleiermacher. Hans Gadamer *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994), 331-333. It is interesting to note how, especially with Schleiermacher's influences from German pietism, “application” becomes
has only become harder to cross, and many other well-known modern biblical projects have suffered a similar blow at the hands of postmodernism.\textsuperscript{245} We could list here Adolf Harnack’s reduction of biblical content to kernel and husk (personal application and historical propositions), as well as Bultmann’s reduction of the Bible to Kerygma and Myth (existential application versus the facts of Scripture). Harnack and Bultmann well-represent a generation of biblical critics who struggled with confidence in the integrity of Scripture, and therefore its “facts,” yet still wanted to hold on to the Bible as a guiding religious book with ethical and existential implications.\textsuperscript{246} Thus, for Harnack, the unwanted “husks” of Scripture (so-called historical facts, theological propositions, etc.) were peeled away from the tender kernels that remained after higher criticism ravaged the field of biblical scholarship, and for Bultmann, the Bible’s historical propositions and implicit theology were shelved alongside other “mythical” works.

What was left of modernism’s hermeneutical and theological endeavor is little more than the empty shell that has become postmodernism and its subjective hermeneutics. It is in this context that we find Vanhoozer particularly helpful in his proposal of a virtual reversal of the postmodern paradigm which exalts the reader’s authority over the authority of the biblical text. Horton’s appreciation of Vanhoozer’s contribution at this point is well-noted when he says, “In this light, we could concur with Vanhoozer, who has posed an intriguing reversal of postmodern theory in which the reader as lord (overstanding) is displaced by the reader as servant (understanding).”\textsuperscript{247} As a response to the tired problem of how to cross the gap between the world of today and the events of Scripture, the DR paradigm begins with the idea that the reader already lives her life within the drama that the Bible reveals. The challenge then, is in learning to faithfully participate in the process of interpretation and in coherently living out the Bible’s

\textsuperscript{245} See chapter 6 below for a fuller Treatment of Lessing’s views and their implications for preaching in a postmodern context.


theology. To the extent that we find ourselves to be participants in the drama, we do not exaggerate a sense of discontinuity from the drama itself. Nor do we exalt ourselves over the story as though merely functioning as exalted spectators and critics. In Horton’s words, “While the church is not the master of the text, it is the amphitheater in which the Word creates the reality of which it speaks, the place where a valley of dry bones becomes a resurrected community.”

If postmodernism has proven anything, it has proven that hermeneutical and epistemological autonomy do not exist, and that neither the Biblicist nor the skeptic has an easy claim upon truth. Each has to live with the burden of its own presuppositions and acknowledge their own non-neutrality. Every interpreter of the Bible and history does so from the perspective of an informed narrative (or drama), whether realized or sublime. Everyone is living in a dramatic story; the only question is which one, and whether or not the story is coherent and tenable. In this sense, the distinct hermeneutical presupposition of the DR paradigm is one that does not exaggerate the distance from the biblical text (script) but rather underscores participation within the story of the text. Vanhoozer articulates this as the distinct purpose of Scripture:

Scripture has a role—a speaking, acting part—in the drama of redemption precisely as divine discourse. Scripture not only conveys the content of the gospel but is itself caught up in the economy of the gospel, as the means by which God draws others into his communicative action.

De Ruijter says something similar regarding God’s role crossing the bridge of history, “It is God himself, who through his own speech-acts bridges the distance with the Bible and the reader, and calls the reader to the use of Scripture through the hearing of the Word.” In this view of Scripture, the Bible is not reducible to that which conveys theological content or propositions, but must rather be seen as a divine means of self-revelation and also incorporation of others into God’s historically unfolding drama.

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248 Horton, People and Place, 98.
249 For a helpful summary of this hermeneutical conundrum or “circle” see Grant Osborne, The Hermeneutical Circle (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 376.
252 De Ruijter, Horen naar de stem van God, 105. Translation mine.
Thus, according to Vanhoozer, it is the reduction of theology to mere propositions (largely divorced or abstracted from their canonical context) that has exposed the Achilles heel of orthodoxy, and in some ways capitulated to modernism’s theological approach. Along the lines of this critique he says,

The heart of the critique consists in the claim that propositionalist theology, while claiming to be biblical, is actually modernist in its epistemology inasmuch as it buys into modernity’s reduction of knowledge to information and into modernity’s myth that rationality is universal.253

It is to this concern that Vanhoozer is responding with a particular goal to defend orthodoxy in the context of recognizing the Bible’s redemptive narrative, as well as its unambiguous pastoral goal: orthopraxy.254 This is accomplished in the drama of DR paradigm by the work of the Holy Spirit that draws the Christian into the Scriptural drama through union with Christ.255 On this point, Vanhoozer says, “Christian participation is rather pneumatic: those who participate in the theo-dramatic missions do so through union with Christ, a union that is wrought by the Spirit yet worked out in history by us.”256 Nichols puts this idea in a similar light, “We who have read the story, we who have been brought into the story through our union with Christ and by his work, we who love the story, also live the story.”257 Such a work of uniting people securely into the work of Christ wrought by his part in the drama of redemption can only be accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit. The drama of redemption revealed in Scripture is both revealed by the Spirit and invigorated by the Spirit. Apart from the work of the Spirit, the drama falls flat.

3.5 Redemptive-Historical Preaching and the Drama of Redemption

In this penultimate section we would simply like to connect the dots between the DR paradigm that has been presented thus far and RH preaching. What is hoped to have been shown by now is that the drama metaphor is pastorally effective for communicating biblical content and is historically preceded. While the danger of anachronism is recognized, we hope to have cautiously avoided that pitfall by attempting to paint a backdrop for the use of the drama metaphor in exegetical, theological, and historical strokes. Now we would like to suggest a few ways in which the DR paradigm shares notable points of symmetry with the RH paradigm, but

253 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 87.
256 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 366.
257 Nichols, Welcome to the Story, 141.
more importantly, has the ability to advance the RH preaching paradigm beyond some of its previous and current struggles.

To begin, according to the advocates of the DR paradigm referenced thus far, the idea of the gospel as the over-arching, dramatic, covenantal metanarrative is the hermeneutic key to Scripture. The unfolding drama of redemption within the canon is what gives Scripture its shape, function and authoritative voice. The Bible, in this view, is authoritative not because man (including the church) says it is, but because God is its author. This presupposition overshadows both the DR and RH paradigms. More importantly, it is worked out homiletically as the RH paradigm begins with the idea of God’s word as covenant revelation, with the primary accent falling upon God’s redemptive plan to save his people through the work of Christ. The person and work of Christ is the interpretive lens through which the rest of the Bible is to be understood. In contrast to modernism and postmodernism, neither the DR paradigm as we are advocating it, nor the RH paradigm, begin with man. They each begin with God. God is the author of the script; the Holy Spirit is the director of the script through the ministry of the word, and Christ comes as the climactic denouement of the drama in the fullness of time to give his Spirit. The Spirit’s role in the drama of redemption is of perpetual significance from beginning to end. As Wells rather eloquently puts it:

As for the Spirit, the incorruptible ‘witness’ who registers all things objectively, he is also the ‘love of God poured forth’…throughout the entire drama; he is profoundly involved from within, right to the very end, and ‘with sighs too deep for words’ he moves the tangled drama on toward its solution, ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God.’

The goal at this point is to juxtapose the primary concerns of the RH preaching paradigm in a fairly natural way with the DR paradigm. Both are concerned to see the unfolding of God’s redemptive plan, climaxing in Jesus Christ, as the primary message of Scripture. Both view God’s part in the drama as the main point or epicenter of the story. Both also wish to do

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258 Richard Hays has convincingly argued for the New Testament’s adaption of a “figural” reading of the Old Testament, and that in particular this is the way the gospel writers read and proclaimed the Old Testament, seeing Jesus as its goal and interpretive lens. He also argues that the historical-critical model, refusing to read the New Testament on its own hermeneutical terms, has failed to appreciate the particular literary genre which the Bible actually embodies. Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Witness (Waco: Baylor, 2014), 2-6.
259 John Piper, “Jesus Christ as Denouement in the Theater of God” in With Calvin in the Theater of God, 133.
260 Wells, Improvisation, 50
261 WCF 8:5. See also Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible, 60. Greidanus’ cautions about an exaggerated Christocentricity at the expense of a proper theocentricity are duly noted. Greidanus, Sola Scriptura, 176-177.
justice to the way in which not every story in the Bible is effectively the same story; but rather, each story needs to be understood in the light of its canonical or RH context. Yet again, the various stories (dramas) are not to be treated as isolated, independent stories, disconnected from the whole, any more than a scene from a play was meant to be understood outside the context of the broader drama of which it is a part. In Gibson’s words, “If the Old Testament is Act One of the drama and the New Testament is Act Two, we could hardly preach Act One without some testimony or reference to the fact that Act Two (its fulfillment) has now taken place.” The parts interpret the whole and the whole interprets the parts. But the main interpreter is God himself, who teaches us to interpret his dramatic word through the analogy of faith. In De Graaf’s words, “The Scriptures are a unity. The Old Testament is the book of the coming Christ; the New Testament of the Christ who has come.” Thus, as we shall illustrate more fully in subsequent chapters, the New Testament itself would seem to require a dramatic, Christ-centered hermeneutic of the Old Testament. We believe these concerns overlap significantly in both the RH and DR paradigms, and in that sense, while the two paradigms are obviously different, they share certain elements of common DNA.

The striking difference between the two paradigms is arguably the most fascinating and homiletically promising. In chapter one the critical observation was made that one of the likely reasons that the RH preaching debate in the Netherlands went into a stall and was unable to resolve certain homiletical tensions, was its over-reaction to poorly done, moralistic application, including the troublesome division of doctrine from application. In addition to this, it also did not effectively fuel a sufficiently missional outlook for the church. It is here that we find that the DR paradigm helps the RH preaching paradigm to take a step out of the mud in which it has been trapped. In as much as early Dutch RH preachers and homileticians wished to overcome the doctrine/application or objective/subjective dualistic dilemma, we would propose that a viable

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263 Goldsworthy, in a similar vein, affirms canonical unity while protecting textual nuances. So he says, “The unity of the canon is a dogmatic construct stemming from Christology.” He goes on to give a helpful list of ways to unpack this, along with cautions that keep the treatment of each text from sounding the same. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 251-252. See also Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 161-162.


266 Johnson rightly portrays this as the theme of the Bible that both harmonizes the Old and New Testaments, and also “unlocks” the Bible as a whole for the modern preacher. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 9.
option may be found in the contemporary DR paradigm. The doctrine/application and objective/subjective approach to homiletics in many ways reflects the same dualism that the DR paradigm is reacting to in the area of theology. Thus, the endeavor here is not to re-write the church’s homiletic or theological tradition, nor to oppose it. That said, there may be a way in which at least the rhetorical means of communicating, both in the area of theology as well as homiletics in particular, may be helpfully advanced by the use of the drama metaphor and the DR paradigm as a whole. Case in point: locating the church’s role in the context of preaching.

In our view, the RH preaching paradigm (particularly the early Dutch version) was not altogether consistent or helpful when dealing with the question of where the church fits in to the sermon. In many respects, the church regrettably became much like the passive spectator described in the DR paradigm—the pitfall of the modern theological approach. This passive spectator would watch the drama of redemption unfold and come gloriously to its climax in Christ. But what was the church’s part? What role did it play? What did God expect of the church in response? Were spectators merely to give a faithful applause to the concrete acts of God in history displayed before them in the sermon? Are such imperatives as “looking to,” “contemplating,” “rejoicing in,” “resting in,” even “believing” sufficient to satisfy the wonderful complexity of New Testament imperatives and the broader idea of participating in the work of the kingdom of God? It is here that we believe the DR paradigm has the ability to enhance the contemporary discussion of the RH preaching paradigm further, particularly in a postmodern context. A sermon is much more than a creative display of God’s redemption as something merely to be believed; it is also a summons to active participation in the drama of redemption by the life-giving Spirit of God through preaching of the Word.

Worth highlighting is the nuanced use of the language of participation. This term is not intended to purport in any way that man helps God accomplish redemption, even though man is called to fittingly participate in God’s display of redemption. The Bible’s dramatic revelation is clearly one that intends to draw the church into the drama of the redemption that God is continuing to write until the curtain closes at the end of history. Every hearer of the sermon is called to faithful, creative performance of the life (role) God has given us in this world. We must, in Horton’s words, learn to “…surrender our trivial scripts in order to be written into God’s unfolding drama. And then we go out into the world to live out our new role in this
play.” Every sermon, including an RH one, needs to show Christians how they ought to live out their role in the drama—how they themselves also become living spectacles before the watching world. In Horton’s words, “When Christ is proclaimed in his saving office, the church becomes a theatre of death and resurrection.”

While not upstaging God with our own petty performances, we none-the-less need to faithfully fulfill whatever it is that God has scripted for us in his word and through his Spirit. As De Ruijter puts it, “Preaching is defined, in this light, as Spirit-innovated work through the concrete script for the current act in the actual scene of the drama of God’s salvation.” In this sense the DR paradigm faults the RH paradigm (especially RHD) implicitly for not more fully developing the church’s role in the drama of the end of the age—especially the Great Commission. But much more important than simply rendering an implicit critique of the RH preaching paradigm, the DR paradigm gives a spirited breath of fresh air to invigorate preachers with an approach that strongly unites the text and church, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The peculiar contribution of this approach is that it does not presume an exaggerated distance between Scripture and the church or between doctrine and application. Rather, it starts with the presupposition of an inclusive script (Scripture) that intends to identify the proper role of every person in God’s drama of redemption—beginning with God, yet also including his covenant partners.

3.6 Cautions and Conclusion

While we are deeply grateful and indebted to the various advocates of the DR paradigm and their particular contributions, we want to suggest a few cautions and potential objections. First, while we greatly appreciate the implementation of metaphors such as drama, theater, etc., to describe the Bible’s unfolding message and the church’s role within the plan of God in history, we want to suggest that the metaphor should not be pressed too far. It is only a

267 Horton, Christless Christianity, 205.
268 Ibid., 141.
269 De Ruijter, Horen naar de stem van God, 118. Translation mine.
270 Trimp, Heiliggeschiedenis en prediking, 12-17. We should note here an important term in Trimp’s work “omgang” which in English might rendered as concourse, intercourse or fellowship. It captures the idea of “covenant partnership” perhaps better than the English “covenant partners” conveys.
metaphor. As noted by others, there are certain places where the metaphor is very helpful, and other places where it breaks down. For instance, ironically, one of the hardest places to apply the metaphor is in identifying the pastor/preacher’s role.²⁷² Is he a director? (No, that is the Holy Spirit).²⁷³ Is he a stagehand? Something else? Various authors who attempt to develop the DR paradigm struggle to identify exactly what the analogous role to the pastor would be in the theater.²⁷⁴ This simply illustrates for us that like all metaphors, even the drama metaphor breaks down and has limitations. We do not believe this limitation is fatal, but it serves as a caution to not over-apply the metaphor.

Secondly, the DR paradigm, and particularly Vanhoozer’s formulation, seems to come close to rendering a broad-scale critique of the time-tested method of systematic theological endeavor. We have noted that for Vanhoozer, the Bible cannot be reduced to that which simply conveys content. In this light, he mildly distances himself from traditional approaches to systematic theology and what he describes as the “epical approach” to theological propositions. Vanhoozer critiques (without abandoning) the traditional approach to systematic theology as being potentially reductionistic—lifting biblical ideas out of their historical, narrative context and folding them into a system of propositions, divorced from the context and implied pastoral intent. According to Vanhoozer, “The main problem with epic theology, then, is that it opts out of the drama altogether and takes an external, spectator’s perspective upon the contemplated play.”²⁷⁵ In a review of Vanhoozer’s book, Williams seems to summarize, if not overstate Vanhoozer’s concern by saying:

> The propositionalist reading of the Bible—looking for truth-statements—denies any relevance to the form of Scripture. The action of the drama of redemption is drained away; the text of Scripture is de-dramatized as the narrative—the biblical story, is treated merely as a delivery system for a deposit of doctrinal truth, a truth which is itself conceived of in ahistorical terms.²⁷⁶

In this regard, we would suggest a bit of caution, lest the proverbial baby be thrown out with the bath water. We agree, in general, with the concerns expressed regarding epic, or propositional theology, as Vanhoozer puts it, but our concerns are focused more on the ways in

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²⁷² This concern about the pastor’s role in particular is shared by others. Cf. Jensen, book review of The Drama of Doctrine, 228.
²⁷³ Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 33, 448.
²⁷⁴ This somewhat vague application of “director” to the office of pastor is well-illustrated in Matthew Mason, “Back to (Theo-drama) School: The place of Catechesis in the Local Church”, Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology, 30 no. 2 (Autumn 2012): esp. 19.
²⁷⁵ Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 86.
²⁷⁶ Williams, “Theology as Witness,” 17.
which theology is communicated, rather than the substance itself.\textsuperscript{277} In fairness, it is arguable that even those theologians who wrote what Vanhoozer describes as “epic” systematic theologies would affirm the importance of wedding orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And does not such a theologian as Bavinck prove at least a mild exception to Vanhoozer’s broad critique of modern systematic theologies?

Additionally, we find it difficult at times to distinguish Vanhoozer’s critique of the former (rhetoric) from the latter (substance) and are concerned that the very thing Vanhoozer is hoping to preserve—the church’s theology (theology as summary of the biblical script)—may be vitally threatened by an over-reaching critique of the traditional formulations of theology. The irony of this would be to unnecessarily re-script the theological identity of the church. Never the less, the particular value of Vanhoozer’s work for us is that it helps communicate (even defend) theology in a way that is sensitive to the narrative of postmodern rhetoric and its particular interest in the rhetoric of drama. A similar note of appreciation, ironically, might be ascribed to earlier methods of communicating systematic theology and preaching; they also were a product of their time and rhetoric, and served an important purpose in their own day, in part by comporting to rhetorical norms in vogue at that time. Thus, while the rhetorical effects of the DR paradigm are particularly helpful in the current theological environment, caution should warn against too quickly dismissing the rhetorical appropriateness of a previous generation, less they are anachronistically judged by the measuring stick of contemporary rhetoric. The same could and should be said of preaching from a different era.

Our third concern is an outworking of the second. Does Vanhoozer’s rewriting of the theological-rhetorical script potentially die the death of too many qualifications? In other words, while attempting to help dig the contemporary theological enterprise out of the ditch dug by postmodernism, does the DR paradigm (especially as Vanhoozer formulates it) potentially fall into the same ditch? When reading through his seminal work, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, we find ourselves wondering, which theological script \textit{in particular} should the church perform? Vanhoozer speaks over and over about the importance of sound doctrine, right theology (orthodoxy), as well as rightly-practiced theology (orthopraxy), but it is not entirely clear which theological confession or tradition Vanhoozer is advocating as the right one. In this sense, his

\textsuperscript{277} We wonder if Williams is being hyperbolic when he suggests that, “The propositionalist reading of the Bible denies any relevance to the form of Scripture.” Ibid.
confessional allegiance is much more vague than that of other DR advocates (i.e. Horton). It appears that Vanhoozer’s theological rhetoric could be adopted by any number of different confessional traditions. If that is the case, we do not see how it avoids potentially falling into the same relativistic ditch against which it constantly warns.278

We do not wish to overstate this last concern by suggesting that Vanhoozer is arguing for a relativistic approach to theology, or even that his DR paradigm implies a “one-size fits all” theological approach. Still, we could wish for a bit more confessional clarity as to which doctrinal/confessional system is required by the DR paradigm he is advocating. Ignoring these sorts of questions leaves the DR paradigm regrettably open to perhaps too many forms of application, and, ironically, theological vagueness. A vague confessional allegiance leads to a vague script, which in turn is difficult to perform. We close with the potent words of Dorothy Sayers on the importance of dogmatic clarity:

It is the dogma that is the drama—not beautiful phrases, nor comforting sentiments, nor vague aspirations to loving-kindness and uplift, nor the promise of something nice after death—but the terrifying assertion that the same God who made the world lived in the world and passed through the grave and gate of death.279

A sermon’s content needs to be measured on a confessional scale.280 We believe this to be an important qualification, as new hermeneutical and homiletical paradigms will come and go, as further scholarly insights are developed, and as different challenges confront the church. If the exegesis that forms the content of the sermon contradicts the church’s creedal or confessional theology, either the content of the sermon needs to be re-considered, or perhaps one’s creedal commitments need to be revised or reformed. Nevertheless, creeds and confessions form something of a theological fence around the yard of preaching. Inside the fence, there is safety and freedom; but when sermons lead the church outside the boundaries of accepted creedal and confessional commitments, there is danger, and the steps of the sermon

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278 This concern is raised by Sarah Lancaster from a feminist point of view in “Dramatic Enactment of Christian Faith: A Review Essay,” 125-126. This is also expressed from a different perspective by Yves Congar in “On Baking Pumpkin Pie,” 254.

279 Sayers, Creed or Chaos, 24.

ought to be carefully retraced. We believe these insights have been well suggested and defended by many authors, including Horton and Vanhoozer.\textsuperscript{281}

Insofar as there is no such thing as a private interpretation of Scripture, we concur with the importance of an ecclesial, and thus confessional reading of Scripture.\textsuperscript{282} Confessional theology aids the preacher in helping congregants to understand not only the scriptural text, but also the text of the world stage upon which they live out their textually driven, theologically informed lives.\textsuperscript{283} In short, confessional theology helps guarantee that our sermon-directed performances of the inspired script are not rogue performances, but are done in harmony with and submission to the community of faith from one generation to the next, thus embodying the theological catholicity of the church. Apart from such confessional integrity and clarity, sermons may lose their rudder, and creativity may slip into subversion of the inspired script, rather than submission to it, thus leaving the church aimlessly adrift upon the sea of postmodern transience. In this context it is hoped that the DR paradigm could be a viable contribution to the work of homiletics, particularly when wed to nuances of the RH paradigm. In the next chapter, we will begin applying this suggestion in the specific context of looking at Hebrews 11 as a test case for our proposed synthesis of the DR and RH paradigms.

\textsuperscript{281} Vanhoozer suggests, “The pastor’s all-important role is to lead the people of God to mount local performances for the kingdom of God. As assistants to the Spirit-director, pastors must avail themselves of the resources of church theology—creedal, confessional, and congregational—as they seek to shape the church’s performance in new cultural and intellectual scenes.” \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 33; see also 413. Likewise, “The creed leads to deeds; doctrine fuels doxology, generating love and service to the saints as well as to our unbelieving neighbors,” Clarence DeWitt “Jimmy” Agan III, “Toward a Hermeneutic of Imitation: The Imitation of Christ in the Didascalia Apostolorum,” \textit{Presbyterian} 37/1 (Spring 2011): 154.

\textsuperscript{282} This very important idea will be more fully developed in chapter six.

\textsuperscript{283} “The competency to do so [preach effectively] you can learn, so that you, as a theologian can translate the Bible (the script) and the tradition of your church (the stage) into the language of the people of your own age.” Van der Welle, “Preken. Ook voor leken?” 13-14. Translation mine.
4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined the drama metaphor in theological and pastoral rhetoric and juxtaposed it with the RH preaching paradigm. One of our goals was to demonstrate how the DR vocabulary might be employed as a helpful metaphor for describing the content of Scripture, and in particular, overlapping affinities it shares with RH hermeneutics. In this chapter, we would like to apply a homiletic synthesis of DR and RH ideas in an exegetical context. We intend to do this by utilizing Hebrews 11 as a case study or, perhaps better put, a test case for how our homiletic proposal comports with a well-known and important chapter of the Bible—one of particular interest for discussions about RH preaching. It should be pointed out that in many respects, this chapter of the dissertation and the following chapter are two sides of the same coin.

In this chapter we intend to offer a brief exegetical treatment of Hebrews 11 with particular sensitivity to how the covenantal work of God in both the DR and RH paradigms is being displayed in the lives of those listed in the hall of faith. To be clear, it is not our goal to offer a thorough exegetical commentary on Hebrews 11. Rather, our intention is to highlight certain exegetical nuances that shed light on past and present questions regarding the homiletic use of Hebrews 11, and the particular question of whether or not Hebrews 11 can be understood in a Christocentric manner. The thesis of this chapter four is that Hebrews 11, properly understood, calls upon the “cloud of witnesses” to testify in nuanced ways how the substance of the new covenant promises was not simply revealed to the Old Testament saints, but was also revealed through them. This latter accent harmonizes the overlapping concerns of the DR and RH paradigms particularly well. In order to accomplish our goals for this chapter we intend first to briefly summarize the various approaches to Hebrews 11. Second, we will look carefully at what may be a hermeneutical key to Hebrews 11 as found in the first two verses of the chapter. Third, we will consider the structure of Hebrews 11 as it relates to the pastoral intent of the book.
Fourth, we will reflect upon what the saints received from God according to Hebrews 11:2.
Fifth, we will consider the import of Hebrews 12:1-2 for understanding Hebrews 11. Finally, we will look in careful detail at the numerous faithful witnesses in Hebrews 11 to discern their key contributions within the historically unfolding drama of redemption. The subsequent chapter (five) will address the important issue of homiletic application from Hebrews 11.

4.2 Various Approaches to Hebrews 11

Why Hebrews 11? This book whose authorship is unknown, is generally recognized as belonging to a first-century congregation, likely coming from a Jewish background and undergoing a variety of trials and struggles as a result of their faith. Though its recipients are under a variety of pressures, the particular temptation before them is that of denying their profession of faith and returning to the visible ministries of the Old Covenant. The author of Hebrews takes great pains to show how the things to which the congregation is tempted to return, particularly those things of the Old Covenant, have been fulfilled in Christ. We would suggest that nearly everything the author of Hebrews touches in the Old Testament, he turns into a revelation of the person and work of Christ in some fashion or another. Jesus is the lens through which the author of Hebrews reads the Old Testament. Thus, the congregation cannot return to the types and shadows that have been fulfilled in Christ. He alone is to be the object of their faith and trust. Thus, the book of Hebrews offers us not only a test case in hermeneutics; it is also a test case in the homiletic or pastoral use of the Old Testament from a Christ-centered hermeneutic. As we shall see, Hebrews 11 functions consistently within the hermeneutic of the

book as a whole, and gives a helpful overview of the way in which the New Testament approaches the Old Testament from an exegetical and pastoral perspective.\textsuperscript{287}

There are also historical reasons why selecting Hebrews 11 as the primary test case for our synthesis between the DR and RH paradigms is preferable. The first is because of the unambiguous position of prominence Hebrews 11 retained in the RH preaching debate in the Netherlands. Hebrews 11 was clearly one of the main texts used.\textsuperscript{288} It is ironic that both the exemplaristic and RH sides of the debate used Hebrews 11 to defend their position. The exemplaristic view of Hebrews 11 is arguably the one that has enjoyed the widest appreciation in the history of exegesis and homiletics on Hebrews 11.\textsuperscript{289} We could also suggest that it is the most common approach still in vogue today, in and out of Reformed pulpits. In the exemplaristic approach the Old Testament saints of Hebrews 11 are held up \textit{primarily} as imitable models of what it means to walk by faith in obedience to God, and the pastoral implication of the chapter is to be like them by following their example of faith, perseverance, and obedience.\textsuperscript{290}

By contrast, the RH approach to Hebrews 11 argues that the author of Hebrews neither intended to give a strict definition of faith in the beginning of the chapter, nor did he intend that the \textit{primary} function of the chapter was to hold out examples of faith to be followed. The author of Hebrews, according to the RH view, places the primary accent of Hebrews 11 on God revealing how He worked in history through the faith of his people to bring about that which would be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. To be sure, there are abundant nuances that might properly belong to the characterizations above, even by authors who were lined up in one camp or another within the debate. The most important nuance we will highlight is that there were exemplaristic theologians and pastors who still recognized the priority of

\textsuperscript{287}“To see how Hebrews reads the Bible is to learn how we likewise might read it.” Charles Anderson, “The Challenge and Opportunity of Preaching Hebrews,” in \textit{Preaching the New Testament}, eds. Ian Paul and David Wenham (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 140.

\textsuperscript{288}Greidanus lists it among the three central texts of the debate, including 1 Corinthians 10 and James 5. Cf. \textit{Sola Scriptura}, esp. 116-117. Commenting on Hebrews 11, Holwerda says, “Not only does Hebrews 11 prove nothing against this view, the whole view of salvation history is foundational to Hebrews 11.” \textit{Begonnen hebbende van Mozes}, 95. Translation mine. For a compelling critique of Holwerda’s narrow view of Hebrews 11, see Trimp, \textit{Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking}, 92. Van ’t Veer seems more balanced in saying, “But it is already the case that the nature of faith enters into the foreground here, and not so much the content of faith; never the less in Hebrews 11 this is redemptive-historically intended.” \textit{Van de dienst des Woords} (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V., 1944), 166. Translation mine. See also Houtman, \textit{This is Your God: Preaching Biblical History}, 112.

\textsuperscript{289}Johnson offers a thorough explanation of this approach to Hebrews 11 in \textit{Him We Proclaim}, 233.

\textsuperscript{290}See, for instance, the particular application of the exemplaristic approach to Hebrews 11 in J. Huijser, “‘Exemplarische’ prediking” in \textit{Gereformeerde theologisch tijdschrift} 50 (1950): 160-182, esp. 180-182.
redemptive revelation in contrast to what we might call *bare exemplarism*, even though they placed the pastoral accent on the exemplaristic nature of Hebrews 11. On the other side, there were pastors and theologians who, while giving priority to the objective revelation of redemptive history (the RH side), still saw a place for properly deduced imperatives to imitate the lives of the saints in Hebrews 11. Thus, it is not entirely fair or even helpful to refer simply to the exemplaristic or RH sides of this debate without qualification. We admittedly find that many of these over-simplifications muddy the waters of the debate by not recognizing certain laudable nuances of each side. Even worse, to neglect some of these mediating nuances allows for regrettable caricatures of both sides of the debate to be formed and perpetuated without qualification.

Outside of the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands, generally speaking, the majority of interpretative approaches to Hebrews 11 have clearly fallen upon the exemplaristic side. Where nuances exist, they still affirm a primary emphasis on following the examples set before us in the hall of faith. Many of these nuances will come out as we work our way through the chapter. Yet bound to the question of whether or not the saints in Hebrews 11 are given as examples for our imitation is the question: what exactly are the saints *examples* of? In other words, are they being held up as ethical examples? Legal witnesses? Athletes who have finished their own races upon the course we are still running? Are they spectators in a coliseum? These and other explanations have been given in an attempt to understand the particular ways in which the author of Hebrews seems to be employing the hall of faith. Each of these ideas has its own merit, some more than others; but it is only by working through the chapter and looking particularly at the first and last verses of the pericope that we can confidently form an opinion.

4.3 Translation Trajectories of Hebrews 11:1-2

“Εστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὗ βλεπομένων. ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.”

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not see; for by it [faith] the elders were witnessed [to].”\(^{291}\)

\(^{291}\) Translation mine.
These opening verses to Hebrews 11 have understandably received considerable attention in light of the numerous questions that have plagued expositors and preachers of Hebrews 11. In many respects, the way one translates these two verses will significantly affect the way the rest of the chapter will be interpreted both exegetically and homiletically. Of key significance are the ways in which the two words ὑπόστασις (substance) and ἑλεγχος (evidence) are interpreted. Various translations treat the terms quite differently: the one resulting in a subjective translation of these foundational words, and subsequently the remainder of the chapter; the other tradition translates the words more objectively, which results in a potentially different approach to the chapter as a whole.\footnote{Van Bruggen dismisses the importance of whether ὑπόστασις is taken objectively or subjectively when he says, “The discussion over the question of whether hupostasis indicates an objective certainty (foundation) or a subjective confidence is less than meaningful. Faith is by nature subjective (to trust), but it focuses on certain promises and is thus an objective ground of hope.” In Van de Kamp, Hebreeën, 268. Translation mine.}

We might compare the importance of this exegetical decision to shooting an arrow from a bow. Though subtle nuances might be hard to determine at the release of the arrow, yet in time, those subtle directive nuances will have a significant effect on where the arrow lands. So it is with the translation of Hebrews 11:1-2. A brief sketch of the various translations will reveal the inclination toward an objective or subjective interpretation of these watershed verses. We shall arrange the specimen translations into two categories; the first will be those that translate verses 1-2 more subjectively, the latter will be those that translate them somewhat more objectively.

The majority of translations fall into the first (subjective) category, and is well-demonstrated in the ESV’s rendering which says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.” We could add to this following English translations (NIV, NASB, ASV, RSV, NLT), as well as Dutch (NBV, and NBG-Vertaling 1951). Each of these translations, in one fashion or another, translates ὑπόστασις and ἑλεγχος with a more subjective accent. An alternative is found in the Dutch Statenbijbel,\footnote{The view of Hebrews 11:1 was much discussed and debated in the earlier RH debates. It reads, “Het geloof nu is een vaste grond der dingen, die men hoopt, en een bewijs der zaken, die men niet ziet.” (Now faith is the firm foundation of the things for which men hope, and a display of things sought, but not seen). Translation mine. Though opinions varied, in the end it was arguably inconclusive.} as well as the King James and New King James versions, the latter of which says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.” William Lane’s translation in his commentary...
expresses this remarkably well. His rendering is, “Now faith celebrates the objective reality [of the blessings] for which we hope, the demonstration of events as yet unseen. On this account the men of the past received attestation by God.”

In the majority of English translations, the key word ὑπόστασις is translated with “assurance,” “being sure,” or “confidence.” In a similar and consistent light, ἔλεγχος is translated “conviction,” “certainty,” etc. The emphasis here suggests that the main accent of faith seems to fall upon what it means in the life or subjective appropriation of the believer. By contrast, the KJV, NKJV, and the Dutch Statenbijbel each place an accent on the objective. In other words, whereas the first group of translations suggest that faith is that which resides in the subjective experience of the believer (confidence, assurance, conviction, etc.), the latter group of translations allow for the idea that the faith in Hebrews 11 has more of an emphasis on faith as testimony (as evidence, proof, etc.) to the unseen realities for which believers still hope. For the one group of translations, then, the focus of Hebrews 11 implicitly lends itself to emphasizing the subjective faith of the individual saints; for the other group, the focus tends toward highlighting what is being revealed through the faith of each of the saints. Our goal here is not to present a rigid either-or approach, but to show how the objective side of faith in Hebrews 11 is both viable and important in understanding the theological and pastoral purpose of the hall of faith.

Our suggestion is that the key words ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος in 11:1 allow for an objective accent (one that focuses on ὑπόστασις as revelation) that is consistent with the rest of Hebrews and its theological interpretation of the Old Testament. The first key word,
ὐπόστασις occurs in Hebrews 1:3 and 3:14. In 1:3, the accent is upon the superiority of the revelation of God in Christ: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature299 (ὐπόστασις), and he upholds the universe by the word of his power…”300 The argument is based on a movement from the lesser to the greater. God revealed covenant promises to the Old Testament saints, yet has perfected that revelation in Christ (a pattern which is suggestively repeated in Hebrews 11:1-12:1-2). The author’s point is to show the superiority of Christ to the covenant promises and ministries of the Old Testament, as they have been eschatologized (that is, brought to their consummate fulfillment) in him. Even though God spoke in “many times and in many ways”301 in the past, Jesus is the climactic Word of God that supersedes the promises, types and shadows of the past as he fulfills them. But not only is Jesus the fulfiller of God’s Word in the flesh, he is also God himself in the flesh, tabernacling among his people.302 He is the radiant revelation of God himself, the exact imprint χαρακτήρ (imprint), from which we get the English word “caricature,” of God’s person. Hebrews 1:1-3 is clearly about the revelation of God, not only in his Word, but particularly in Christ, the Word of God incarnate.303 Thus it would appear that a revelatory emphasis of ὑπόστασις in Hebrews 1:3 seems to be the most natural read.304 In this light, Rhee suggests, “If the objective understanding of upostasis and elegkos is correct, then the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 may be stated as ‘Faith is the reality (or substance) of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen.’”305

299 The KVJ and NKJV have “person” in place of “nature.”
300 ESV.
301 Hebrews 1:1.
302 P.H.R. van Houwelingen notes the absence of significant reference to the temple in Hebrews, but numerous references to the tabernacle, in spite of the fact that the temple was arguably still standing at the time of the writing of Hebrews. There are implications in this for the transient nature of the Old Covenant, and its giving way to the better, eschatological ministry of the New Covenant. “The Epistle to the Hebrews: Faith Means Perseverance” in The Journal of Early Christian History 3, no. 1 (2013): 100. See also his “Riddles Around the Book of Hebrews” in Fides Reformata XVI, no. 2 (2011): 157-158.
303 Graham Hughes persuasively argues that this is the point of Hebrews: “To hear what the Scriptures have to say about themselves,” and to see Christ as the “final content of God’s Word.” Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 56, 58.
304 This point is well argued from several angles by S.M. Baugh, “The Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11” WTJ 68 (2006): 113-32.
305 Rhee, Faith in Hebrews, 217.
If the only use of the word ὑπόστασις in Hebrews was in 11:1, it would be hard to understand why so many translations go the more subjective route in this verse. We would propose good reasons why the subjective use not only appears in so many translations, and ought not to be dismissed, but wed to an objective priority. First, there is another use of ὑπόστασις in Hebrews that seems to have a subjective accent.306 In Hebrews 3:14 we read, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence (ὑπόστασις) firm to the end.”307 The idea of “confidence” is consistently used in the various English translations.308 While this translation is commendable, what we are called to cling to in this verse is not the idea of faith in the abstract, but to remain standing upon the firm foundation of faith—Christ himself.309 This nuance is picked up in the Statenbijbel which renders ὑπόστασις “firm foundation.”310 In other words, the author of Hebrews is pastorally admonishing the community to hold fast to Christ through faith and thus to rest upon him as their firm foundation.311 He is the “substance of the covenant”312 and is therefore to remain the object of their faith.313 Thus, for the author of Hebrews, the idea of those in the community abandoning their confession of faith in Christ was not to be even considered. For this reason, we have to admit that while the subjective implication of Hebrews 3:14 is evident, it cannot be the only implication of ὑπόστασις.314 Historically, Koster notes that early patristic exegesis favored a more objective translation with substantia, and that Luther’s innovative subjective translation in the Reformation period “introduced a wholly new element into the understanding of Hebrews 11:1,” and that this

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306 See a helpful treatment of this see D. Holwerda, Hebreeën: Vertaling met korte aantekeningen en 18 bredere studies (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 84-89. He discusses the relationship of ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος together.
307 ESV.
308 We noted an interesting nuance in the Statenbijbel, “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the beginning of this firm foundation to the end.” Translation mine.
309 “Our preference is to interpret ὑπόστασις in an objective sense, either of ‘the basic stance’ the author and listeners took when they received the gospel, or ‘the reality’ of becoming partakers of the messianic identity.” O’Brien, The Letter To the Hebrews, 151. O’Brien also suggests. “The objective sense seems to make better sense of the instances of the term in 1:3 and 11:1.” Ibid.
310 Translation mine.
311 Cf. Psalm 68:3 in the LXX which renders ὑπόστασις as “foothold” (ESV, NIV, NASB).
312 “Considered objectively, the substance of the covenant is comprised of God’s saving acts in Christ and the explanation of those acts in Christian theology.” R. Scott Clark, Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005), xviii.
313 A similar idea is found in Hebrews 6:9, where Christ is the “anchor” of our souls, which, even though hidden from our eyes, continues to keep us secure in our spiritual position, much the same way an anchor hidden underwater secures our position on top of the water.
314 Further reason to appreciate the subjective understanding of ὑπόστασις is that its only other New Testament usages outside the book of Hebrews (2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17) where the subjective sense seems stronger.
new perspective of faith in Hebrews 11:1 as personal and subjective “has governed Protestant exposition of the passage almost entirely.”  

We would like to suggest a few more reasons why this discussion about the definition of faith ought to be nuanced, and appreciation for the objective idea ought to be given more consideration. First, ὑπόστασις is not the only noun used to qualify or define faith in Hebrews 11:1. The second noun, ἐλεγχός (evidence), is also arguably a more objective term (perhaps even more than ὑπόστασις). Though ἐλεγχός is a hapax legomenon in the New Testament, it is used in extra-biblical Greek of legal matters where objective evidence is presented in order to buttress a case in which those being compelled to make a judgment are not eyewitnesses to the matter in question. Buschel affirms this use of ἐλεγχός by saying, “In Hebrews 11:1, in the well-known characterization of faith, ἐλεγχός means proof’ or ‘persuasion’ rather than correction. But it cannot be taken in the sense of subjective persuasion, since this does not correspond to the usage.” The subsequent content of Buschel’s paragraph goes on to defend the importance of the objective use of ἐλεγχός, yet goes on to translate/paraphrase Hebrews 11:1 as, “Thus faith is confidence in what is hoped for, since it is the divinely given conviction of things unseen.” We agree with Buschel’s emphasis on ἐλεγχός as “evidence” or “proof” and believe that this is a very important qualification when considering whether or not ὑπόστασις is to be given an objective accent, as in Hebrews 1:3, or subjective, as may appear to be the case in Hebrews 3:14. We believe the context requires an accent on the former—that the faithful in Hebrews 11 both subjectively possess and objectively reveal the redemptive work of God, thus testifying to the reality of the things that have been revealed and perfected through Christ.

315 Koster, TDNT, VIII, 586. BAGD argues strongly against the subjective reading. “The sense ‘confidence’ or ‘assurance’ must be eliminated, since examples of it cannot be found. It cannot [the subjective rendering] cannot, therefore, play a role in Hebrews 11:1, where it has enjoyed much favor since Luther.” BAGD, 847.
316 L&N defines it as, “The evidence, normally based on argument or discussion, as to the truth or reality of something — ‘proof, verification, evidence for.’ προγμάτων ἐλεγχός οὐ βλέπομενον ‘a proof of the things we cannot see’ or ‘evidence that what we cannot see really exists’ Heb. 11:1.” See Baugh’s in-depth discussion in “Cloud of Witnesses,” 114-116.
318 Buschel, TDNT 2.476.
319 Ibid.
320 Simon Kistemaker observes that the author of Hebrews never quotes the words of Christ or other apostles, but exclusively employs the Old Testament as witness to the New Covenant realities that have come in Christ. The Psalm Citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews, PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1961. (Wed. G. Van Soest N.V. 1961, Amsterdam), 113.
Such a usage of πίστις (faith) is consistent with the New Testament usage of the term. J. Gresham Machen has noted that πίστις has a range of meanings in the New Testament, some being objective while most are subjective, and that caution should be employed when using Hebrews 11:1 as a comprehensive definition of faith. So he says, “These words are not a definition of faith or a complete account of faith: they tell what faith is, but they do not tell all that it is, and they do not separate it from all that it is not.”

Though not conclusive for our study here, examples of the objective use of πίστις may be found elsewhere in the New Testament. The point here is to simply suggest that the New Testament is not unfamiliar with using πίστις as a reference to the objective revelation of God through his words and works in history, and that such a usage is worth considering when approaching Hebrews 11:1 and the revelation on display in the hall of faith. Though exclusively subjective translations of Hebrews 11:1 abound, an objective nuance of the verse is still conceivable (as will be shown below). A wedding of these ideas could throw a very interesting light on the hermeneutic and homiletic intention of Hebrews 11. First it will be suggested how the structure of Hebrews 11 might also support a view which includes an objective accent of πίστις alongside the subjective.

4.4 The Structure of Hebrews 11

Numerous efforts have been made to propose a structure to Hebrews 11. One of the more creative is that of Victor Rhee who argues for a chiastic structure of the chapter as a whole. Rhee adopts Vanhoye’s thesis that the entire book of Hebrews is chiastically arranged, with the center of the book being Hebrews 9:11-14. Rhee then builds upon this thesis to suggest particularly that there is a chiastic structure to Hebrews 11, which places verses 13-16 at the center of the chiasm. While we find this article to be helpful in many ways, and the prospect of a chiasm in chapter 11 to be provocative, we are not convinced of Rhee’s proposal for several reasons. First, it makes chapter 11 (and the proposed chiasm) largely disproportionate, placing


322 Jude 3 is perhaps one of the clearer examples, which says, “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (ESV, emphasis added). See also 1 Timothy 1:2; 3:9; 4:1; 6:10, 21. None of these verses necessarily inform the usage of ‘faith’ in Hebrews 11:1, but they do show the potential for a broader semantic range in the NT than simply a subjective understanding of πίστις (faith).

the center of proposed chiasm very early in the chapter. Second, and more importantly, it fails to account for the important way in which the end of Hebrews 10 and the beginning of Hebrews 12 form a bracket around Hebrews 11. Thus, rather than viewing Hebrews 11 as a chiasm, we would suggest that the boundaries of Hebrews 11 are defined by way of inclusion—opening with faith in 10:37-11:1 and then closing with faith in 11:39-12:2. In our view, the author’s comments on Habakkuk 2:4, “My righteous one shall live by faith” at the end of chapter 10 form one side of a bracket, and the comments at the beginning of chapter 12, which identify Jesus as “the author and finisher of faith” form the other side of the bracket. What comes in the middle is the hall of faith in which the author of Hebrews illustrates how “the just shall live by faith.” Their faithful lives not only demonstrated the forward-looking nature of faith, but they were also revelation of the one who is himself, the “author and perfecter” of their faith.

While Hebrews 11 does, in many ways, function as an independent unit, at the same time, it is vital to see it in the context of what comes before and after. Hebrews 10 deals at length with Jeremiah 31, the promise of the New Covenant (verses 1-18), followed by a paraenetic section in which the church is encouraged to draw near to God with language that ought to remind them of their own professions of faith, baptism, and community obligations (verses 19-25). It then proceeds in verses 26-31 into what is arguably the strongest warning in the book of Hebrews, second only to chapter 6. Then, in 10:32-39 the author of Hebrews reminds his audience of the way in which they have already persevered through so much suffering and distress together. Noteworthy is the implementation of the “theater” language of verse 33, where the author refers to the community as a “theater of suffering” (θλίψεσιν θεοτριτζόμενοι). He describes their suffering in a tender, encouraging manner, and then finally brings them to a very important exposition of Habakkuk 2:4.

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325 Emphasis added.
326 Emphasis added.
328 Attridge offers several suggestions as to the particular context of the persecution endured by the church, rightly concluding that while the specifics of their “theatrical” performance are unclear, what is clear is that the community endured public humiliation together. Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 298.
329 Cf. chapter 3 above for a fuller exposition of the theatrical reference in Hebrews.
This section is of significance for understanding Hebrews 11 for several reasons. Already noted is the way in which it helps to form the structural bracket of the inclusio, with the second part of the inclusio being found in the beginning of chapter 12.\textsuperscript{330} Secondly, this brief exposition of the promise that the “righteous shall live by faith” is a preemptive commentary and preliminary introduction to the hall of faith. It is the author’s way of staging the heroic performances of those in the hall of faith.\textsuperscript{331} The faithful heroes of chapter 11 become living illustrations of the reality of this resurrection promise, as well as legal witnesses to its truthfulness.\textsuperscript{332} Furthermore, the orientation of the Habakkuk exposition is clearly eschatological and pastoral in nature.\textsuperscript{333} It involves the climactic coming of God in judgment at which point he will separate those who have drifted away in unbelief from those who “have faith and preserve their souls.”\textsuperscript{334} We can hear an echo of the author’s use of Israel in the wilderness in chapters 3 through 4 as an illustration of the consequence of unbelief—they refused to hear God’s voice and follow him by faith; they thus died in the wilderness outside the land. Yet the promise of the New Covenant offers the hope of a better covenant based upon a better mediator and even better promises. To the extent that the promise is better, so also is the promise of judgment more severe for those who fall away into unbelief. The author’s pastoral plea is that the members of the community might see the superiority of the New Covenant ministry of Jesus Christ and cling to him by faith.\textsuperscript{335} To the extent that some might be tempted to fall away in unbelief, the author-pastor wants them to see the grave, eschatological consequences of mocking the Son of God who has come to fulfill all the promises of God, including the promise to judge even his own people who rebel against him in unbelief (10:30-31). Thus, the conclusion of chapter 10 draws together not only the promise of eschatological judgment for those who fall away, but also promises of eschatological life in the presence of God for those who have persevering faith.\textsuperscript{336} These

\textsuperscript{330} Rhee, \textit{Faith in Hebrews}, 181.
\textsuperscript{331} Cynthia Long Westfall, \textit{A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between Form and Meaning} (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 243.
\textsuperscript{332} Baugh states, “My understanding of Hebrews 11 proceeds from the author’s presentation of the OT believers recorded in the biblical record as recipients of divine testimony to the coming eschatological realities, and thence by faith they became participants in and witnesses to the world to come.” “Cloud of Witnesses,” 113.
\textsuperscript{334} Hebrews 10:39.
\textsuperscript{335} This is inseparable link between Christology and soteriology is the focal point of Hebrews. Thomas Schreiner, \textit{Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology} (Grand Rapids: Baker 2010), 116-117.
realities are displays of the “things hoped for” (προγμάτων ἐλπιζομένων) that are “yet unseen” (οὐ βλέπομένων) described in 11:1, and of which the rest of Hebrews 11 offers a panoramic, theatrical display. In these varied contexts of judgment and/or blessing, the saints of Hebrews 11 display what it looks like to be righteous and live by faith in a historical context that previews God’s day of visitation.

4.5 What the People of Old Received

A few things need to be said about Hebrews 11:2 and the particular issue of what exactly is being said about the hall of faith. Numerous translations render the verse in a way that emphasize the idea that by faith the Old Testament heroes received their “commendation” (ESV, NIV), “approval” (NASB), “good report or good testimony” (KJV, NKJV). The Statenbijbel translates it, “For through their faith the elders have become witnesses.” Generally speaking, the accent of these translations suggests that the Old Testament saints were applauded or commended because of their faith. Such an emphasis could certainly lead to a more exemplaristic treatment of the saints in general. Baugh, adopting a different reading of the text, has argued convincingly that while the verb ἐμαρτυρήσαν can mean to “approve” or to “praise” elsewhere in the New Testament, the consistent usage in the book of Hebrews falls upon the idea of receiving revelation or being witnessed to. The verb occurs elsewhere in Hebrews (7:8, 17, 10:15) and five times in chapter 11 (2, 4[2x], 5, 39). The sense is most clearly asserted in 10:15 “And the Holy Spirit also bears witness (μαρτυρεῖ) to us; for after saying…”

The emphasis of Hebrews 11:2 thus appears to be that God was not simply commending, but witnessing to the Old Testament saints through various means (1:1), granting them revelation of the things to come, which they received by faith (11:2). As the author says in 4:2, “for

338 Translation mine.
340 Ibid., 118, fn22. See also Baugh’s treatment of the related cognates.
341 ESV, emphasis added.
342 BAGD inconsistently suggests that in 7:17 the verb should be translated “of whom it is testified” then in 11:2 “be well spoken of by someone.” 493. It regrettably does not comment on 10:15.
good news came” (literally, “was preached”) to us just as it did to them. By faith, the Old Testament saints received and embraced those promises. In this way, they were “witnessed to” by God himself concerning the promises of the covenant. As those who were witnessed to by God, they also become witnesses to us of the same realities. Van Bruggen sees a similar accent when he says, “Through God’s witness these people were objective witnesses for us of the things that we hope for and that are not yet seen.” Relatedly, O’Brien translates the verse with the sense of commendation, then conversely points out, “It was by faith that the ancients received testimony from God.” Support for this nuanced rendering of 11:2 is also found in Ellingworth and Nida who suggest that the language “won God’s approval” is literally “were witnessed to,” ie., by God. “The meaning may be more precisely “God speaking in Scripture.”

4.6 Hebrews 12:1-2

Turning briefly to Hebrews 12:1-2, we see the other end of the inclusio. Many have made the point that Hebrews 11 cannot be properly understood apart from the beginning of chapter 12. That Hebrews 11 is still in view is made clear not only by the conjunction “therefore” (Τοιγαρονύν), but also by the reference to the “cloud of witnesses” in 12:1. The exhortation to set aside those things that might hinder the race of faith (sins and weights), as well as the exhortation to run the race of faith with endurance, are qualified by the manner of running—one with their eyes fixed on Jesus. Ellingworth notes the importance of this Christ-centered focus when he says, “It is remarkable that it is not the Old Testament believers of chapter eleven, whose life of faith is so far unfulfilled (11:40), who are now held up as examples to be followed, but Jesus himself.” In this way, the New Covenant community is to imitate the heroic saints who have not only finished their own races of faith, but who did so by looking

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343 Such is the implication of the aorist passive participle εὐηγγελισμένοι.
344 “The witness is borne to the life which was inspired by faith.” Brooke Westcott, The Epistle To the Hebrews: The Greek Text With Notes and Essays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 351.
346 O’Brien, The Letter To the Hebrews, 400, emphasis added.
349 Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 637.
ahead to the fulfillment of the promises of God in Christ. While the coliseum imagery comes to mind, so also does the idea of legal witnesses, those who have received their approval from God (11:2), and now give their own testimony to the faithfulness of God to keep his promises. The fact that they have finished their own races, in spite of manifold adversity, testifies to the power of the resurrection not only to invigorate the living, but also to give life to the dead. This thought is affirmed at the end of Hebrews 12, where the saints who have entered glory through the veil of death are mentioned in general, and notably Abel, the first ‘hero’ in Hebrews 11, who is mentioned again by name. It is noteworthy that the author connects Abel’s blood to the “sprinkled blood” of Jesus Christ. According to the author of Hebrews in 12:1-2, Jesus is the “author and perfecter (αὐρχηγόν καὶ τελειωτὴν) of faith.” The first term, αὐρχηγόν is defined by Delling as, “The hero of a city, who founded it, often gave it its name, and became its guardian.” In the Septuagint (LXX), the term was used in reference to the tribal chieftains. In the New Testament, Jesus is called the ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς “Author of life” (Acts 3:15) and the ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτήρα “Leader and Savior” of his people (Acts 5:31). The term is used one other time in Hebrews (2:10) and is rendered “founder,” “pioneer” or “captain” in various translations. In Hebrews 2:10, it is given a similar meaning as one who initiates a movement. Jesus is the pioneer who opens the way to God for sinners that become righteous in him, and he leads those who have been estranged by sin back into the holy presence of God. In this light the work of Christ, as described in Hebrews, is not simply a movement toward God in general, but a particular fulfillment of all that God promised in Genesis 3 and later typified through various translations.

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351 “The great ‘cloud of witnesses’ with which the new covenant believers are ‘surrounded’ comprises those who have borne witness to Christ before his incarnation, of whom we read in chapter 11.” David McWilliams, Hebrews (Powder Springs: Tolle Lege Press, 2015), 343.
352 We will return to this shortly.
353 Several translations, including the ESV, make this a possessive genitive, and thus translate τῆς πίστεως with “our faith.” While this is grammatically possible, we think is more of a consequence of having adopted the subjective approach to 11:1, than it is a necessary interpretation, as is seen in the various other translations.
354 TDNT, 1.487 L&N is similar: “a person who as originator or founder of a movement continues as the leader — ‘pioneer leader, founding leader.’” 36.6. Thayer’s comments on the use of Hebrews 12:2 are apt, describing Jesus as one “who in the prominence of his faith far surpassed the examples of faith commemorated in Heb. 11.” Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon, 747. See also J. Schelhaas, “Christus en de historische stoffen in de prediking,” in Gereformeerde theologisch tijdschrift 42 (1941): 126.
355 Cf. Numbers 1:16; 2:3:32, and in particular, the frequent usage in Numbers 7 where the chieftains make offerings of dedication on behalf of their tribes.
modes of revelation. In the Garden of Eden God spoke to Adam, but that word was not mixed with faith and perseverance in the covenant. Adam was expelled by God, and this ministry of judgment was attended by cherubim who guarded the way back into the garden (Genesis 3:24), thus disallowing Adam to enter in. The book of Hebrews seems to be quite mindful of this as is evidenced by its perpetual exhortation to enter into God’s presence, as well as the frequent references to the ministry of angels.356 Furthermore, the idea of Christ as the one who leads his people into the presence of God though his mediatorial work is the over-arching theological theme of the book of Hebrews.357

The second key term in 12:2, “perfecter” (τελειωτήν), is very important in the book of Hebrews. It also bears an eschatological connotation, and refers to the way in which the ministry of Christ supersedes those of the Old Covenant (prophet, priest, king, sacrifice, temple, revelation). All these things are not only “better” (κρειττον) in Christ; in him, they find their perfect fulfillment. This idea of “perfection” is also very important in the book of Hebrews.358 The law and the Old Covenant ministries to which it was attached are clearly described in Hebrews as being unable to perfect the ones who benefited from their ministry. The effect of this was to leave them in a position of needing something better which could only be found in Christ. The pastoral import is strong: whereas certain members of the community were succumbing to numerous pressures to depart from the church and return to the ministries of the Old Covenant, the author-pastor is pleading with them to see that those ministries could never bring about the perfection of the believer nor the consummation of the covenant. Something more, something perfect and eschatological was needed not only to reverse the curse, but also bring about the covenant promise “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Such perfection, according to Hebrews, can only be found in Christ. That is why the author-pastor alludes to Christ not only as the “author and perfecter” of faith, but also as the one upon whom the weary pilgrims of this present evil age must keep their focus. To look away from him will

356 See particularly chapters 1, 2, 12, and 13.
357 In Hebrews “To be above the angels is to be God, to be below the angels is to be human.” Thus, the Christology of the book of Hebrews is that the one who mediates is the divine God-man. Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 241.
358 Schreiner notes that in Hebrews, “perfection” is attained through suffering and vindication, and that as particularly embodied in Christ himself. Magnifying God in Christ, 115.
inevitably lead to stopping in one’s race of faith and becoming shackled to the “weights” and “sin” which hinder endurance.\(^{359}\)

There is another important connotation of the term “perfecter” (τελειωτήν) that we wish to address. As has been noted, in the book of Hebrews, Christ has clearly been portrayed as the perfect prophet, priest and king. He is also the perfect sacrifice. But in what way is he the perfecter of faith in Hebrews 12:2? This is an important question, and the way in which it is answered will significantly affect the way the hall of faith is treated in chapter 11 (similar to the suggestion about the way in which the understanding of Hebrews 11:1 affects the rest of the chapter). Our proposal is that Jesus is the “perfecter” of faith in the sense of being the one who fulfills it. He is not simply the object of faith, nor the destination of faith; he is the fulfillment of the hall of faith. In other words, as we shall shortly demonstrate, Jesus is the one who amplifies and fulfills the nuances of revelation revealed in each of the heroes in Hebrews 11. Insofar as Jesus is referred to as the perfecter of the ministry and revelation given by the various offices and ministries of the Old Covenant, he is also the perfecter of the testimony given by the “cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 11. It might be said this way: Jesus is the “better than” Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc., in that he fulfills not only what they were hoping for, but that to which their particular lives were witnessing. Jesus is not simply the object of their faith; he is also the one whose very life is being revealed in their lives of faith. We might liken the heroes of chapter 11 to facets in a diamond. While each facet is unique, they are yet a part of the same diamond. Each facet captures particular nuances of light, color, etc.\(^{360}\) yet to look at a facet of a diamond is still to look at the diamond itself. In this respect, Jesus is God’s climactic, eschatological Word (Hebrews 1:2).

Consistent with this, we would express caution in regard to the insertion “our” in Hebrews 12:2 (where Jesus is thus described as the author and perfect of our faith). The possessive pronoun, while a grammatical option, is not required by the text, as is evidenced in the translation variations.\(^{361}\) Our reservation is not only grammatical, but also theological. To

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\(^{360}\) Van Bruggen highlights the particular contributions of those in Hebrews 11, who, though united in faith, each have their own particular “history and scope.” J. Van Bruggen, “Hermeneutics and the Bible” in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches* (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 2001), 168.

\(^{361}\) This is affirmed by Ellingworth and Nida, who suggest, “‘Our’ may be supplied if Jesus is the source [of faith] but not if he is the example.” *A Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, 290.
simply call Jesus the author and perfect “of faith” leaves the text intentionally open to the way in which Jesus is not only the fulfillment of our faith (the subjective side of faith), but how Jesus also is the “perfecter” of the faith, in the sense of perfecting the revelation being revealed in the hall of faith (in an objective manner, consistent with Hebrews 1:1-2).\textsuperscript{362} In our view, the author of Hebrews is accenting the way in which Christ is the climax of God’s redemptive revelation—his speaking and acting. Even though God has and continues to speak through the saints and prophets of old, his definitive revelation is in Christ, the eschatological Word of God incarnate. This suggestion seems to be in keeping with the ‘both-and’ approach to the subjective-objective dilemma of Hebrews 11, and more importantly, the philosophy of revelation set forth in Hebrews as a whole.

In summary the book of Hebrews seems to require us to view the hall of faith not simply as \textit{ordo salutis} examples to be imitated, but also as \textit{historia salutis} examples of revelation that contribute to the canon by revealing previews of the gospel in their lives of faith.\textsuperscript{363} In this way the Old Testament saints were participating in the drama of redemption, embracing and revealing the promises of God by faith. As will be shown more fully later, the same is true for the church today. This is our hermeneutical approach to Hebrews 11 on the basis of the theology of the book as a whole, the pastoral concern of the book, and the brackets formed by the bookends of the “faith” statements found at the end of chapter 10 and the beginning of chapter 12. What remains is to survey the heroes of chapter 11 to demonstrate how their lives of faith participated in and testified to the better things that would come in the person and work of Christ, the author and perfecter of faith.

4.7 The Drama of Christ in the Hall of Faith

A few preliminary remarks are in order here regarding methodology. It is not our intention to examine each of the “by faith” examples in Hebrews 11 in exhaustive detail. Rather, in more of a cursory fashion, we intend to apply the interpretative suggestion above; namely, that each of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11, while displaying a commendable faith, also

\textsuperscript{362} As Richard Hays notes, Jesus “recapitulates and culminates the testimony of the whole cloud of faithful witnesses rhetorically summed up in chapter 11.” \textit{The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

\textsuperscript{363} McWilliams suggests “We must be careful not to turn the \textit{roll} call of faith primarily into a \textit{role} call of faith, as is often done…the text is not preaching Abraham or Samson, but Christ.” \textit{Hebrews}, 342, emphasis original.
participated in revealing the better “things to come” with the redemptive work of Christ. This methodology is cautiously related to the idea of typology, in that it suggests that the saints of Hebrews 11 are both examples of faith in the commonly understood sense, but also witnesses to “things to come” through the divinely shaped details of their lives. To look at Hebrews 11 in this light is hardly new. As Goppelt suggests regarding the author’s of Hebrews intention in chapter 11, “No attempt has been made to conceal the fact that because they are part of a salvation that has already been experienced and are also shadowy types of the salvation that appeared in Christ.”364 We must grant that much of their testimony can only be understood retrospectively as testifying of Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith stories. On this retrospective idea, Greidanus helpfully notes:

The underlying concern about reading typology retrospectively is that we leave ourselves open to the charge of reading meaning back into the Old Testament text that is not there. But one could counter that typological interpretation is not reading meaning back into the event described in the text but simply understanding this event in its full redemptive-historical context.365

While this caution is apt, at the same time, it does not contradict what seems to be the interpretive method of Hebrews as a whole; namely, to read the Old Testament in the light of the coming of Christ and the better things that came with him.366 This is not to say that everything in the Old Testament referenced in Hebrews is a type of Christ, but rather that Christ, and the better (perfect) things brought by him are the interpretive lens through which the author of Hebrews appears to read Old Testament history.367 This method is clearly and importantly distinguished from allegory because of the profound and necessary emphasis on redemptive history.368 At the same time, it relates to the idea of typology through the progress of redemptive history. Thus, the heroes’ individual scenes display far more than simply their own subjective faith experiences in history. They were participants in revealing God’s unfolding redemptive drama as those to whom and through whom God was speaking.369 At the same time, the people listed in Hebrews 364 Leonard Goppelt, Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New, trans. Donald Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 175.
365 Greidanus, Preaching Christ From the Old Testament, 252.
366 Clowney, Preaching and Biblical Theology, 34.
367 Vos views this as the distinction between the preparatory character of the Old Covenant over against the final character of the New. The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 52. He suggests the author Hebrews views those living under the old covenant as living in a “world of shadows.” Ibid., 52.
11 also display what it looks like to walk with God en route to the consummation of the promises of the gospel that find their fulfillment in Christ.\textsuperscript{370} As shall be seen in the following chapter, it is this idea of walking with God in persevering faith that the congregation is particularly called to imitate. In order to accomplish our goals for the present chapter, some exegetical comments will be made about each hero of faith, and various commentaries and published sermons will function as conversation partners along the way, some offering insights that agree with our thesis, and others that offer differing points of view. Additionally, the light of other conceptually related verses shall be considered from the perspective of the analogy of faith (letting Scripture interpret Scripture).\textsuperscript{371} This idea is important, in that while we certainly recognize interpretive distinctions among the New Testament authors; at the same time, there is an essential harmony that binds their interpretive methods—namely, the revelation of the person and work of Christ and the pastoral implications of Old Testament revelation.

\textit{Creation (Hebrews 11:3)}

It is noteworthy that while verse 2 would appear to introduce a long list of people (the hall of faith) the section begins rather with a reflection and commentary on our understanding of creation itself. “We” are the first people introduced in the hall of faith, as we “understand by faith that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Creation is the necessary foundation of subsequent revelation. According to the author of Hebrews, what is seen in creation was not made out of visible things. We would suggest that this point in Hebrews is much like the apologetic of the Pentateuch itself: the God who has redeemed both Israel and the church is the God of all creation.\textsuperscript{372} The “Word of God” language peppers the book of Hebrews, primarily as a redemptive word that culminates in Christ. Here it is posited as not simply the redemptive word, but the \textit{creative} and foundational Word of God that sets all things in motion.

\textsuperscript{370} Trimp, \textit{Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking}, 91.
\textsuperscript{371} We recognize that this is akin to walking a thin line of imputing all that the rest of the Bible says about an idea in other places into one word or verse. This exegetical fallacy is referred to as ITT (Illegitimate Totality Transfer). At the same time, it is generally understood that the Bible interprets itself, and that hard texts are to be understood through the light of easier texts.
While the point of creation’s inception is initially in view, the question of pattern is immediately set before us. The issue the author seems to be addressing is whether or not the things that can be seen were made out of things that were already visible. The answer is in the negative—they were not. The things that exist have been brought into existence by the creative Word of God.\textsuperscript{373} That having been said, the created things were still patterned \textit{after something}. God, the creator-consummator is viewed as a masterful painter, without a stroke of his creative energy being wasted. Everything that he creates is intentional and purposeful. Creation itself is infused with an eschatological goal, culminating in the person and work Christ in history to the glory of the Triune God.\textsuperscript{374} The first day sets in motion a number of days that must, of necessity, climax in the consummate Sabbath day. In this sense, protology anticipates eschatology, and is mediated, in terms of revelation, through the lens of typology.\textsuperscript{375} The protological creation week gives way to a consummate day of rest and doxology for God himself—the Alpha and Omega of creation. That the first creation is patterned after the last/new creation (and not the other way around) is demonstrated from exegetical and theological observations. First, the Bible both begins and ends in a garden.\textsuperscript{376} But the garden in which the Bible ends is not simply a return to the first garden, but a movement forward to an eschatological garden that far supersedes that of the first garden.\textsuperscript{377} The chief illustration of this is that in the new, eschatological garden, neither sin nor death are present, as death itself is said to have died (Revelation 20), and the covenant promise of God, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Revelation 21:3) is consummately fulfilled. Adam, in the protological garden, never knew such irrevocable intimacy with God. All that he had that was good could potentially be lost.

In terms of the Christocentric nature of the garden covenant with Adam, several New Testament passages force us to understand the way in which the first Adam was always intended

\textsuperscript{373} Bruce suggests that the role of the Son in creation (1:2) is assumed in here in Hebrews 11:3. \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 278-279. This would make for an interesting positioning of the Son as both the creator-author of the creation story, as well as its perfecter (i.e., Hebrews 12:1-2). Ellingworth, however, dismisses the idea that the Son is in view here. \textit{The Epistle to the Hebrews}, 570.

\textsuperscript{374} Vern Poythress, \textit{In the Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach} (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 98.

\textsuperscript{375} For a fruitful study on this topic of typology in the book of Hebrews, see Geerhardus Vos, \textit{The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), esp. 55-65. Vos’s suggestion that the Old Testament types are patterned after heavenly realities which would enter history with the coming of Christ is remarkable. See esp. 58.

\textsuperscript{376} Cf. Genesis 1-2 with Revelation 22.

to give way to the person and work of the last Adam. In a similar manner, Romans 5:14 renders a commentary on Adamic revelation, in that it articulates the fact that the first Adam was a type of the last Adam (τὸ άτομο τοῦ μέλλοντος), Jesus, who was to come. Accordingly, it is not that Christ, who came last, is patterned after Adam, who came first. But the opposite is the case—the first (protological) Adam is patterned after the last (eschatological).

A similar statement is made by 1 Corinthians 15:45, which juxtaposes both “Adams” with protological and eschatological language. “Thus it is written, ‘The first (πρῶτος) man Adam became a living being;’ the last (ἐσχατος) Adam became a life-giving spirit.” The point we are emphasizing is that a revelatory relationship exists between the design of the first and last Adams. Yet the first is not only patterned after the latter; the ministry of the latter definitively supersedes that of the former. Christ’s work perfects the work of the first Adam, in as much as the new creation perfects the first, and the eternal Sabbath perfects the initial Sabbath. This is the point of Hebrews 11:3, to show that creation was infused with a destiny that stretched out before it. Hebrews 11:3 is thus foundational to the remainder of the chapter in which the movement from protology to eschatology, and from typology to fulfillment is understood “by faith.”

To have begun with the creation is entirely proper and pastoral. The Pentateuch does the same, and the author of Hebrews, seeking to rescue those who are tempted to return to the shadowy and provisional ministries of the Old Testament, employs an apologetic/exegetical method consistent with that of Moses who showed Israel that the one who redeemed them is the one who has created all things. Creation is the colorful backdrop against which all of God’s dealings with man unfold in history—including redemption. It is the theater of God’s glory.

Cain and Abel (Hebrews 11:4)

It is not arbitrary that the first martyr (witness) mentioned in Hebrews 11 is Abel. Abel is the first of many things. He is the first person recorded in Scripture as having offered to God an acceptable sacrifice (Genesis 4:4); he is the first person in Scripture to die a martyr’s death (Genesis 4:8; cf. Matthew 23:35), and he is the first person in Scripture to clearly evidence the

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378 Cf. the revelation of God’s “glory” in creation in Psalm 19 with the redemptive glory revealed in Christ, the head of creation, as described in John 1:1-14.
principle that the “just shall live by faith.” Abel’s testimony is that not even death can separate those who have faith in the promises of God from receiving those promises (Romans 8:35). At a very basic level, Abel is clearly a commendable example of faith. Yet at a deeper level, he is the first witness to the resurrection, as is indicated by Hebrews 12:24 where Abel is an example of one who, though he died, still speaks, and is counted among the “spirits of the righteous made perfect.”

It is remarkable that such dramatic tension should be displayed between these first sons of Adam and Eve—Cain and Abel. As soon as the fall occurred, God promised that another “seed” would be born in time, and that this seed would be bruised by Satan, yet would ultimately crush Satan in triumphant victory. That Eve thinks Cain, her firstborn son, might be the promised seed is suggested from her confession (Genesis 4:1) (“I have acquired a man through the LORD”). The sad irony is that Cain clearly was not the promised seed of redemption, nor was he in line with the spirit of Christ. He rather proved to be in line with the seed of the serpent. This was evidenced in several ways.

Cain and Abel both bring offerings that are notably the first sacrifice offered by humans after the fall. The chronological language “in the course of time” (תֵּתֵר יְמֵי), is suggestively like the setting of a stage in which the sacrifices are the main event. Cain, arguably is the central figure of the story, not Abel. Commentators have wrestled with the objective basis of God’s accepting Abel and rejecting Cain. The text is not explicit as to God’s reason for rejecting Cain. Nor does the Genesis text explicitly refer to the faith of Abel or unbelief of Cain; both can only be deduced by inference. Cain’s offering (Genesis 4:3) was simply of the “fruit of the ground” and God rejected it. It was neither a blood offering nor an offering of firstfruits, and

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380 Genesis 3:15.
381 The LXX reads “καὶ εἶπεν ἐκτησάμην ἁνθρωπόν διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.”
382 Bruggeman, Genesis, 55. The phrase is also used elsewhere of an unspecified period of time, i.e. “in the course of time” (Genesis 40:4) and “at the appointed time” (Numbers 9:2). Gordon Wenham suggests the time marker “in the course of time” likely implies at the end of the first year when harvest occurred. Genesis 1-5, 103.
383 Eric Peels has convincingly made this point from both the structure of Genesis 4 and from the theological implication of the older brother being upstaged by the younger. “In het teken van Kaïn: Een theologische exegese van Genesis 4.” Verbum et Ecclesia 29.1 (2008): 177.
384 This does not vindicate Brugeman’s suggestion that God acted “capriciously” in rejecting Cain and accepting Abel. Bruggeman, Genesis, 55-56.
385 Kuruvilla observes that thus far the “ground” has only been referenced to in regard to the curse (Genesis 3:17), Kuruvilla, Genesis, 80.
it does not appear to have been offered from a posture of faith. Some have suggested that the garments of skin provided by God in Genesis 3:21 occasioned the first animal sacrifice in Scripture, and that by implication, the rejection of Cain’s offering lies in that it did not follow the pattern of sacrifice established by God.  

Abel, by contrast, implicitly followed God’s pattern of sacrifice, and by faith offers a firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:4). Again, the text is not explicit as to why God “had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain he had no regard” (Genesis 4:4-5). Stedman goes so far as to say, “It is a mistake to read into this Genesis account any hidden reasons for God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering and rejection of Cain’s.” While not wishing to read something artificially into the text, the narrative seemingly suggests that these sacrifices are to be highlighted for their significance, and thus the disposition of the heart seems to be revealed in the type of sacrifice that is offered.

Furthermore, immediately following God’s rejection of Cain’s offering and acceptance of Abel’s, Cain murdered righteous Abel, evidencing that Cain’s heart was truly distant from God. Abel alone receives God’s approbation, only to be forcefully upstaged by the jealous rage of Cain which ends in fratricide. It is tragic irony that the first recorded episode of worship ends in death and judgment. Cain proves to be the first murderer in biblical history and sadly, his

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386 Von Rad notes that while the text does not explicitly resolve this riddle, “The only clue one can find in the narrative is that the sacrifice of blood was more pleasing to Yahweh.” Geerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 104. Waltke, by contrast, contends that in the Old Testament, the “tribute” offering was a bloodless sacrifice (Cf. Leviticus 2:14) and suggests the fault with Cain lies in that he did not bring the best (firstfruits) but only that which appears to be a token offering. *Genesis*, 97. Horton helpfully brings the two ideas together, suggesting that while the tribute offering would be a part of the acceptable sacrifices, Cain fails to bring a blood guilt offering (as did Abel) on this important occasion of the first recorded sacrifice in human history since sin entered the world. *Pilgrim Theology*, 193.


388 Ray Stedeman, *Hebrews* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 118. Ironically, Stedeman, following Bruce, defends the idea that it was over the disposition of the brother’s hearts that God accepted the one and rejected the other. But the text does not say that either, a point that is highlighted by Steve Moyise, *The Latter New Testament Writings and Scripture: The Old Testament in Acts, Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles and Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 103.
brother Abel, the first martyr.\(^{389}\) In connection with this, Cain is the only person from the Old Testament mentioned in the book of 1 John, and that for his murderous example of one we ought not to imitate.\(^{390}\) Thus, Cain’s role is an antagonistic one, as the city of God develops in sharp contrast to the city of man.\(^{391}\)

That dramatic irony abounds is seen in the fact that it is not unrighteous Cain that dies in the scene but righteous Abel. Where are justice and the promise that the just shall live? It is here that Abel’s testimony is the strongest, not in life but in death. For even in death, Abel’s voice is still heard by God, and God comes in judgment upon Cain. Again, with dramatic irony, the judgment upon Cain is neither total nor immediate. Both must wait: Cain for climactic judgment, Abel for climactic vindication. Yet Abel’s faith does not display simply his own righteousness, obedience, and martyrdom. In him, we see the display of another who will actually fulfill the Genesis 3:15 promise of the seed of the woman; one who will offer to God a more acceptable sacrifice on a consummate stage in the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4); one whose righteousness, obedience, and martyrdom will exceed that of Abel; and one who will ultimately redeem Abel and those who join him in the hall of faith.\(^{392}\) Jesus is the truly faithful son of Eve, as well as the “firstborn of the flock” whose sacrifice will put an end to all sacrifices once and for all (the theme of the book of Hebrews). As with Abel, Jesus is ironically martyred on the world stage of God’s glory at the cross. But his death is not the end of him, just as it was not for Abel. Rather, Jesus triumphs over death and its cause (sin) through his resurrection.\(^{393}\) The author of Hebrews makes a significant connection between Abel and Jesus in 12:24.\(^{394}\) Whereas the blood of Abel cried out in judgment against Cain, the blood of Christ cries out the

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\(^{389}\) Eric Peels rightly affirms that in this narrative, which is as intriguing for what it does not say as what it does say, “a motif occurs which will play a major role in the book of Genesis: the election of the youngest above the oldest (Ishmael – Isaac; Esau – Jacob, Joseph –Judah, etc.).” “The World’s First Murder: Violence and Justice in Genesis 4:1–16,” in Animosity, the Bible and Us: Some European, North American, And South African Perspectives, eds. John Fitzgerald, Fika van Rensburg and Herrie van Rooy (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 37.

\(^{390}\) I am indebted to Rob van Houwelingen for pointing this out to me.

\(^{391}\) M.G. Kline, Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview (Overland Park: Two Age Press, 2000), 182.

\(^{392}\) This is not to suggest an intentional correspondence between Genesis 4:3 and Galatians 4:4, but simply an analogy.

\(^{393}\) Abel’s drama anticipates the “U” shaped dramatic comedy of the death and resurrection in which the hero must first become the victim. See chapter 2 for further detail on the language of dramatic comedy.

\(^{394}\) Craig Koester sees Hebrews 11-12:24 as one literary unit, and notes, “Initially, Abel’s blood speaks, but in the end Jesus’ blood speaks even more effectively.” Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 469.
opposite for those who have faith in him. It cries out not for justice but for grace, forgiveness, and justification.\textsuperscript{395} This is the “better word” spoken by the blood of Christ in contrast to the blood of Abel.

It is hard to overstate the importance of how the author of Hebrews is clearly uniting the testimonies of Abel and Jesus to the resurrection, the former being typological and the latter being the much “better word” in that it is climactic, final, and eschatological. Abel’s sacrifice, death, and subsequent speaking ministry are eschatologized by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “better” Abel, of whom the life and ministry of Abel were clearly witnessing. This is the way in which the author of Hebrews sets Abel and Jesus side by side as those who testify to the same heavenly realities (Christ’s sacrifice and the hope of the resurrection). While Abel’s voice was heard in the days in which God was speaking through his promises, types, and shadows,\textsuperscript{396} Jesus speaks in these “last days” (Hebrews 1:3), and is God’s final, consummate Word. He is not simply the one who speaks God’s word, but is the Word of God made flesh (John 1), and in him, all things are fulfilled, including the revelation first introduced by Scripture’s first martyr—righteous Abel.

\textit{Enoch (Hebrews 11:5-6)}

Little is known about the enigmatic figure Enoch. He is hailed as the first in Scripture who was taken up into the presence of God without experiencing death itself. It is not incidental that the author of Hebrews should place Enoch immediately after Abel, not only for chronological reasons, but also for theological reasons. Whereas Abel is the first in Scripture to give clear evidence of death and resurrection, Enoch is the first witness in Scripture to the possibility of entering into heaven apart from death.\textsuperscript{397} Thus, Abel died and was buried, and awaits the final resurrection at Christ’s return—which is previewed in the fact that he, though dead, still speaks. Enoch, by contrast to Abel’s violent death, is a preview of those who are mysteriously “caught up alive at the Lord’s coming.”\textsuperscript{398} What was so special about Enoch? In order to answer this, it is important to see the way in which Enoch, similar to Abel, must be contrasted with Enoch’s counterpart, Lamech. Whereas Abel’s contribution to revelation cannot

\textsuperscript{396} Heidelberg Catechism, 19.
\textsuperscript{397} Vos, Biblical Theology, 47.
\textsuperscript{398} Cf. I Thess. 4:17.
be properly understood apart from the backdrop of the tense conflict with his brother Cain, so also Enoch cannot be properly understood apart from the antithetical behavior of Lamech.

Both Enoch and Lamech are the seventh descendants down the two lines of ‘seeds’ descending from Adam. Noteworthy is the Hebrew use of sevens in the idolatrous confession of Lamech in Genesis 4:24, “If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-seven fold.” Lamech sees himself for what he is: a proud man in the line of Cain. Whereas God had pledged to bring seven-fold judgment upon anyone who kills Cain (Genesis 4:15), Lamech boastfully swears that he will stand in the place of God and be his own avenger. What is more, he will infinitely multiply the wound upon any who seek to injure him. The “seventy-sevenfold” hyperbole of Genesis 4:24 truly highlights Lamech’s pride and self-exaltation. In Lamech we see the spirit of the antichrist, the spirit of the age now at work in the sons of disobedience, the proud spirit of Satan himself.

Against this backdrop of unrighteous Lamech is the portrait of faithful Enoch. Enoch is noted as the seventh son of Adam. Hebrew scholars have noted this literary inclusion of sevens is a way to ask the reader of Genesis to stop and consider how the dramatic story of God’s redemptive revelation has unfolded. How are the two seeds promised in Genesis 3:15 developing and are we any closer to seeing a climactic resolution? In this context, Lamech represents the seed of the serpent and his kingdom of pride, murder, and rebellion. Enoch stands out in stark, antithetical contrast. Enoch’s faith and piety are captured in the very simple phrase, “Enoch walked with God.” This language will be used again of Noah in Genesis 6:9, and of Abraham in Genesis 17:1. It is the intimate language of covenant fellowship. It reminds us of the oft-depicted picture of God walking with Adam in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall. The idea of walking with God should not be confused with a moment of standing before God in judgment, or even following after God. It is rather the language of communion—a bond with

399 This is simply deduced by counting the generations from Adam to Lamech, and then doing the same with Enoch. See Kline, Kingdom Prologue, 184. Jude 14-15 says of Enoch, “It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” See also James VanderKam, Enoch: A Man for All Generations (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 2-3.

God formed by God’s condescending grace, and responded to by the faith of Enoch in the God of the covenant.401

Not only does Enoch enjoy intimate fellowship with God, he also functions as a prophet of God.402 In contrast to Lamech who proclaims himself as king of his own kingdom—a kingdom opposed to the things of God, Enoch prophecies the coming kingdom of God and God’s righteous judgment upon all those who rebel against him. He is an early prophet of the latter rains that are to fall in the days of Noah (whose introduction is made immediately following the translation of Enoch in Genesis 5). Enoch testifies that the just shall live by faith, as he is caught up alive into the presence of God. He also testifies that the wicked shall perish from the earth in an all-consuming wave of judgment. In this way, Enoch has the testimony of “pleasing God,” a testimony he had before he was taken by God out of this world into heaven itself. Enoch’s commendation is that he “pleased God” by faith, as the author of Hebrews plainly comments in 11:6. Thus, Hebrews 11:6 functions as a parenthetical commentary on all those, in and out of the hall of faith who have been called into vital communion with God himself. If anyone would “draw near to God” he must do so by faith, for without faith it is impossible to do what Enoch did—be “pleasing to God.”

Noah (Hebrews 11:7)

Noah’s contribution to the history of redemption is remarkably clear and frequently tapped, second only perhaps to Abraham in Hebrews 11. Not only did Noah “walk with God” as was previously mentioned, but to Noah was given the revelation that the pre-diluvian world would be swallowed up in a gulp of divine judgment. The warning comes directly from God himself (Genesis 6:13ff). Of particular interest is the fact that Noah was warned by God “concerning events not yet seen” (Hebrews 11:7) that is, future. All of Noah’s actions surrounding the construction of the ark were based not upon what Noah saw, but upon what Noah heard from God himself. Noah’s faith was a forward-looking faith in the word of God. It was also a lively, hard-working faith. The Noah narrative is filled with vigorous action, leading right to the point where God closes the door of the ark, shutting Noah, his family, and all the gathered animals inside. One could easily wonder why such an unusual story is in the Bible in

401 This sentiment is well expressed in Rick Phillips, Hebrews, 415-417.
402 See Jude 14-15 above.
the first place. But this frequently expressed curiosity brings us to the very point of Hebrews 11: the “cloud of witnesses” is testifying not simply to the reality of their own personal faith, but to the promises of God. Noah has forward-looking faith indeed, but the scene he has been drawn into is nothing less than a dress rehearsal for the eschatological day of God’s judgment. The flood in Noah’s day displays the effect of God’s just judgment coming in climactic, dramatic fullness, as well as God’s intention to recreate the world in a redemptive righteousness that will supersede the days of Noah and even Eden itself. It is a preview of the day in which all those who are found outside of the shelter that God has provided will be utterly swept away in a wave of judgment. Noah, like Enoch, is called a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), in that he does not simply walk with God in quietistic piety, or even build an ark in solitude; rather he builds the ark while proclaiming to the world around him the imminent judgment of God. When that judgment comes, it is only those who are united to Noah that are saved. Noah’s family alone represents God’s electing purposes to save a people for himself.

Of particular note is the fact that not all those who enter the ark are marked out as having faith with Noah. This is evidenced by the events that unfold with Noah’s sons as soon as they exit the ark. The impious display of Noah’s sons leads to another division between the blessed and cursed lines. From Noah will descend not only the line of Shem leading to Abraham, but also the line of Ham leading to the Canaanites. The point we wish to emphasize here is the way in which the faithfulness of Noah becomes the means by which those in Noah are saved from God’s judgment. To the extent that the flood of Noah’s day is an epic display of God’s judgment, it is also necessarily a preview of the final judgment to come. But it is not simply God’s judgment that is displayed in the days of Noah, so also is God’s salvation for those who are found in the preacher of righteousness who is greater than Noah—Jesus Christ. Just as those in the ark can do or contribute nothing that merits their being in the ark, so is it with those who are in Christ. The judgment of God passes over them because they are hidden in the ark of

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403 J. Meijer, in an otherwise fairly severe sermon, notes that Noah’s faith was anchored both in the direct promises from God, as well as the redemptive promises God made while Adam and Eve were still in the garden of Eden. “Noach’s geloof” in Waarheid & Recht 12 (1956): 7.

404 Horton, Covenant and Eschatology, 93.

405 Cf. 1 Peter 3:21. See also Revelation 20:10,15 where all of God’s enemies are cast eternally into a lake of fire. As the Bible often uses water locations as places of judgment (i.e., the crossing of the Red Sea, Jordan River, and other baptismal events), so the flood of Noah must be seen as a preview of eschatological judgment for God’s enemies and salvation for God’s people. See Kline, Kingdom Prologue, 214-218.
God’s salvation with Noah, the righteous servant of God. Yet even Noah himself must find his perfect righteousness in one whose salvation is better than Noah’s. Noah’s story typifies the greater salvation from judgment that will come in Jesus, and only Jesus can complete and perfect the drama of which Noah is a supporting actor who by God’s design has displayed a preview of eschatological realities. In this regard, by faith Noah participates in the revelation of the eschatological things to come in Christ.

*Abraham  (Hebrews 11:8-10)*

Of all those listed in the cloud of faith in Hebrews 11, Abraham receives the most attention. He is an example of those who, by faith, not only inherit the future promises of God, but he also testifies to the reality of those promises of “things to come” through his faith. This is seen in the first of several descriptions given of Abraham in his pilgrim identity. When God calls Abraham in Genesis 12, he promises Abraham a land that he cannot yet see. Abraham must journey to it by faith on a pilgrimage that will stretch his faith in countless ways. Hebrews 11:8 accents the fact that Abraham was told to “go” and began to do so, even before being told where. This is the accent of the language that he “went out, not knowing where he was going.” His faith was manifest in his obedience, and he begins to literally walk by faith and not by sight, abandoning all that he knew (people and place) to sojourn to a land that was wholly unknown to him. His gaze was forward and upward.

What is next said about Abraham even further enhances his pilgrim identity. We are told in Hebrews 11:9 that not only did he sojourn by faith, but that he “lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.” That he and the other patriarchs lived in tents underscores the fact that their homes in the land of promise were unambiguously temporary. Neither Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob ever lived in settled homes; rather, they lived as pilgrims. It is a curious thing that they never had more stable, permanent homes. They did not lack the financial resources to build them, nor had God forbidden them from doing so. Rather, their living in tents throughout the entirety of their stay in the land of promise is indicative of the fact

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406 For N.T. Wright, “The main point of ‘faith’ in this chapter…is that it looks forward to what has been promised but not yet granted.” *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 458.

407 Johnson makes an interesting connection between the pilgrim-people of God living in tents, and God himself dwelling in one in the incarnation, indicating that both were moving forward to a more permanent eschatology and communion with one another. *Him We Proclaim*, 347, esp. fn. 15.
that their true, permanent home was elsewhere. It was in heaven with God. To say this is not speculative; it is exactly what Hebrews 11:10 says, “For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” The contrast could not be clearer: living in man-made, earthly tents is one thing; but living in the eternal city that has foundations and is built by God is something entirely different. The author of Hebrews is demonstrating that the lives of each of the patriarchs were shaped in such a way as to reveal the fact that their true, permanent and abiding city was in heaven with God.⁴⁰⁸ Though they were blessed with wealth and prosperity while living in the land of Canaan which God had promised them, they knew that they belonged to a better country—a heavenly city, and this would be the focal point of their gaze, that constantly lead them forward and upward.

Again, we see a symbolic display, not simply of the faith of the patriarchs, but of the reality of the better things that have come with the person and work of Christ. Though Abraham and the other patriarchs looked forward to and awaited that better city to come, they would not see it in the days of their flesh. They would have to wait for a future day in which they would be perfected alongside the many other saints who would join the patriarchs in their pilgrimage of faith (Hebrews 11:39-40). But more importantly, even Jesus himself came into this world knowing that his kingdom was not to be found here (John 18:36). He was the consummate pilgrim, the one who came in order to bring all those who would follow him by faith into the city that his Father had prepared, and that he would go away to complete after the resurrection (John 14:2). The city to which Abraham and the patriarchs looked forward is the city that Christ alone could bring, and to which the author of Hebrews is referring.⁴⁰⁹ Their earthly homes became the stage upon which their heavenly home was being revealed. Thus, their forward-looking faith in Hebrews 11 is ultimately a part of God’s revelation of the substance of the covenant—a heavenly city that can only be apprehended by those whose gaze of faith is fixed forward and upward.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ For a helpful comparison of the city of God in Hebrews with the eschatological city descending from heaven in Revelation, see J. Van Bruggen, “Het apostolische evangelie als geloofsbelijdenis” in Apostelen: Dragers van een spraakmakend evangelie, ed. P.H.R. van Houwelingen (Kampen: Kok, 2010), 135-141.
⁴⁰⁹ “For Jesus, Jerusalem was no lasting city. He was no longer welcome there.” P.H.R. van Houwelingen, “Wij hebben hier geen blijvende stad.” De Reformatie 79 (2003): 49. Translation mine. This article helpfully shows the way in which from the time of the crucifixion, Jerusalem is clearly no longer the city of Jesus; he was himself seeking a better, eternal home, and this is the ultimate hope of the patriarchs and the church alike.
⁴¹⁰ Kline, Kingdom Prologue, 181.
For them, God is not only the builder and designer of their eternal home, but is also the designer of their dramatic roles in the history of redemption.

Sarah’s Miraculous Conception (Hebrews 11:11-12)\(^{411}\)

In the midst of the Hebrews 11 hall of faith is the story of Sarah’s miraculous conception of Isaac. God made promises to Abraham, and by extension, to Sarah. At the heart of God’s promises is a progeny that would be as innumerable as the sands on the seashore and the stars in the sky.\(^{412}\) Decades passed since God made those promises and yet Abraham and Sarah remain childless. Sarah, in the weakness of her faith, conjures up the Hagar plan, and pleads with Abraham to sleep with Hagar as a means of bringing about an heir.\(^{413}\) Hagar conceives, and immediately begins to despise Sarah, and Sarah treats Hagar with scorn. This was not God’s plan; it was Sarah’s. But both Abraham and Hagar capitulate to Sarah’s request, and this patriarchal family begins to look more like a test case in familial disfunctionality than the fountainhead of God’s covenant people.\(^{414}\) In spite of Abraham and Sarah’s weakness, God gives them a covenant son—Isaac. By the time of Isaac’s birth, Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah is 90. Hebrews 11:11-12 highlights this by noting that not only was Sarah herself past the age of child-bearing, Abraham was “as good as dead” (verse 12) as far as fathering children is concerned. This “as good as dead” language is noteworthy as it shows God’s intentional plan to bring about his promises in a way that would display his power through their weakness.\(^{415}\)

Still, at the time of God’s appointment, Sarah conceives. Her barren, lifeless womb suddenly teems with the child that God had promised so long ago. God tells Abraham to name

\(^{411}\) Dirk Visser makes a plausible argument that Heb. 11:11 should be translated “Through faith he [Abraham] received the power to conceive a child, although Sarah herself was barren, even when he was actually too old, and this because he trusted in the one who had made the promises.” He bases this argument on the text variant discussions, the potential of reading Σύρρα (nominative case) as Σύρρα (dative case, implying means), as well as the express language of Romans 4:18-22 (cf. Genesis 18:10-14). “Verwekte Sara een kind?” in: Ongemakkelijke teksten van de apostelen, eds. van Rob van Houwelingen en Reinier Sonneveld (Amsterdam: Buitjen & Schipperheijn Motief, 2013), 131-133. Translation mine. The effect of this would be to eliminate Sara as the object of subject of Hebrews 11:11, replacing her with Abraham.

\(^{412}\) Genesis 12:2,7; 15:5.

\(^{413}\) As with their laughter at God’s promise of Isaac to come, this is, as J. Smelik puts it, an expression of “pure and unashamed disbelief.” “Sara, mede het zaad der belofte verwekkend door haar geloof,” in: Waarheid & Recht, 43e No. 44 (1948): 2.

\(^{414}\) 1 Peter 3:4-5 makes the point that not only was Sarah the matriarch of Israel, but also of faithful women in the church who by faith, do good and replace fear with faith in God.

\(^{415}\) Horton, Christless Christianity, 150.
the child “Isaac” which means “laughter.” This is often interpreted as God’s chiding reaction to both Abraham’s and Sarah’s laughter when God reaffirmed his promise to give Abraham a son through Sarah at such an old age. While this is plausible, it is likely that the point of emphasis is God’s ability to laugh in the face of his and his people’s enemy—death itself. The fact that Abraham and Sarah are literally taken to the point of death before conceiving Isaac is God’s way of dramatically displaying his power over both the grave and the barren womb. When Isaac is born, tears of barrenness are transformed into the fullness of joy. God’s triumph over Sarah’s womb is a preview of his triumph over death itself. “He who sits in the heavens laughs…” (Psalm 2:4) at his enemies and the enemies that threaten his people. This is the profound lesson that Abraham and Sarah must learn—God’s promises are stronger than death. It is the point that God is also dramatically revealing in their own faith-experience, so that their very struggle to walk by faith and trust God’s promises becomes a display of his resurrecting power—even over the grave-like womb of Sarah, where life takes the place of death and the son of promise is climactically born at the time of God’s appointment.

It would be regrettable to isolate the story of Sarah’s conception of Isaac from Mary’s conception of Jesus and his birth in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4). As Ohmann puts it, “It is He [Jesus] who redeemed Abraham and the patriarchs from so many awkward predicaments and delicate situations, but most of all, it is by his work that the promise is fulfilled in making the promised seed appear on the stage of history.” Isaac is not the only son of promise born to an empty womb in the history of redemption. God appears to Mary and promises the unexpected coming of Jesus in much the same way in which he came to Sarah. Each child’s miraculous conception is forecast by a visit from God and attended by the ministry of angels. Both children are God’s answer to long-made prayers for the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises. Both children also speak clearly to the greatest of all God’s promises, his promise to triumph over death itself and spread eschatological blessings to the nations. Whereas Isaac’s birth is in the context of a barren womb and a father who is “as good as dead,” Jesus is born to triumph over death through his own death and resurrection. In this respect, the coming of Jesus is not only

416 Genesis 17:17; 18:12, respectively.
more miraculous than that of Isaac, but the life and ministry of Jesus far exceed that of Isaac as he overcomes that which Isaac never could—the power of sin which is death itself. In the birth narrative of Isaac, we see a powerful, dramatic preview of the coming of the greater Son of Abraham who will bring about the eschatological fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In this sense, the ministry of Christ is both present to Abraham and yet to come. Van Balthasar, commenting on the forward-looking nature of Abraham’s faith states, “Thus, the time of Jesus also embraces and contains the time of Old Testament—and in a way beyond all we can imagine.”

**Parenthetical Commentary (Hebrews 11:13-16)**

Most commentaries see Hebrews 11:13-16 as being a significant pause in the author of Hebrews’ list of heroes. Some see in it a form of parenthetical application. Suggestively, no one person is in view, but a general collection of “all these.” Some have suggested that those in view are Abraham and the patriarchs, to whom the author of Hebrews has just referred. Others see it as a broad-sweeping generalization of all those listed in the hall of faith. Both suggestions seem to make sense, with the obvious exception that Enoch never dies, and thus would be excluded from the list of those who “died in faith” (11:13). However, it would appear in our view that the former option is to be preferred, not only for the exception of Enoch, but more importantly for the flow of the chapter. The fact that the author returns to his treatment of Abraham and subsequently to the other patriarchs would seem to underscore the idea that it is the early patriarchs who are in view. This also has an interesting pastoral contribution. If the original audience included some who were being tempted to return to the nostalgic and familiar paradigms of the Old Covenant, the author of Hebrews would be exercising a stroke of pastoral

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420 “The central position of vv. 13-16 gives prominence to these reflective comments: they are not simply a parenthesis.” P.T. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, 418. “The central message of Hebrews’ retelling of the OT narratives is powerfully articulated in a summary excursus that our author inserts in the middle of his discussion.” O. Skarsaune, “Does the Letter to the Hebrews Articulate a Supercessionist Theology? A Response to Richard Hays” in Bauckham, Driver, Hart, Macdonald, *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 163. Rhee, as was mentioned before, represents a creative, if not strained attempt to locate this section in Hebrews 11 as the chiasitic center. See fn. 324 above.
422 For a persuasive argument for the former, see Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 356. See also Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 467.
brilliance by showing that even the patriarchs evidenced a faith that was looking forward to an eternal city in the heavens, and that their gaze was fixed forward and upward toward heaven. Those among the Hebrews who were being tempted to return to the preparatory ministry of the Old Covenant were fixing their gaze backward and downward, and were effectively walking the opposite direction of the patriarchs. They were succumbing to the temptation to walk by sight rather than by faith, and were looking for an eternal city of peace here on earth rather than in heaven. Their eschatology was upside down (more earthly than heavenly) and their pilgrim route was reversed (more backward than forward).

The patriarchs, by contrast, saw these eschatological realities to which their lives testify by faith. They “saw them and greeted them from afar” (Hebrews 11:13). In John 8:56, Abraham is said to have seen Christ’s day and rejoiced. In his own day, however, Abraham was a proto-pilgrim, paving a path for future pilgrims to follow. He was joined by the other patriarchs in declaring that on earth they were “strangers and exiles” (Hebrews 11:13), who were determined not to go backward in the covenant, as evidenced in their unwillingness to return to their prior homeland (Hebrews 11:14).

The last comment made in the parenthetical commentary is on the one hand, a high note of praise for the patriarchs, and, on the other, a stern warning to those in the community who depart and shrink back to those things that were all designed to lead forward to Christ and be fulfilled in him. God, we are told, is “not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16). The language of not being “ashamed” (ἐπαίσχυνται) is used of Christ in Hebrews 2:11, where Christ is “not ashamed to call them brothers” who have been sanctified by himself, as they all have the same Father in heaven. Christ is the ultimate reason that God is not ashamed of those whom he names as his own, including the patriarchs. The inheritance they were ultimately awaiting is the same inheritance Christ has earned by becoming

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423 The word for “greeted” (ἐκπασάμενοι) in this context implies the idea of embrace. It is used in Hebrews 13:24 for the greeting the members of the community are to give to their leaders. It is done with a “holy kiss” in 1 Peter 5:14, and it occurs at the end of numerous New Testament books.
424 P.H.R. van Houwelingen suggests that the day that Abraham saw and rejoiced over was the day of Christ’s birth, which Abraham saw by faith. See Johannes: Het evangelie van het Woord (Kampen: Kok, 1997), 203-205.
the “founder and perfecter” of faith—the faith that the patriarchs were actively revealing as they spoke and acted out the drama of redemption.\textsuperscript{426}

\textit{The Sacrifice of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17)}

Thus far, we have been contending that the hall of faith is not simply given to emphasize the subjective faith of the individual heroes, but also to reveal the better things to come in Christ. Perhaps nowhere in Hebrews 11 is this emphasis more clear than with Abraham’s offering up of Isaac. Abraham’s faith in this most remarkable trial in Genesis 22 is exemplary in the best sense of the term. The book of James underscores the fact that Abraham’s obedience in the face of such unthinkable pressure was evidence that Abraham’s faith in God was living and active. It was neither dead nor superficial (James 2:21; cf. Romans 4). While this is a truly remarkable moment of sacrifice in the history of redemption, it is still the case that this is not the most remarkable moment in the history of redemption.

Abraham’s offering up of Isaac is, in many respects, the “John 3:16 of the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{427} Few events in the Old Testament rival it for its unmistakable RH anticipation to the most dramatic event of the New Testament—when God the Father gives up his only beloved Son as a sacrifice. The parallels are numerous. Isaac is not simply a son to Abraham, he is the son, the only son of Sarah, granted by God to Abraham and Sarah when they are 90 and 100 years old respectively. Isaac’s miraculous birth from the yet unopened womb of Sarah is second only to the miraculous birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary. Both children are long-awaited sons of promise. Both sons are clearly loved by their fathers.\textsuperscript{428} Both are the progenitors of the

\textsuperscript{426} As noted above, there are important theological and pastoral parallels between the “city” promised to those who persevere by faith in Hebrews, and the city promised to those who overcome by faith in Revelation. For a fuller treatment of the subject, see P.H.R van Houwelingen, “Contouren van een nieuw Jeruzalem: Hebreë en Openbaring over de eschatologische wereldstad” in Het stralend teken: 60 Jaar exegetische vergezichten van Dr. D. Holwerda, eds. K. Van der Ziel and H. Holwerda (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2010), 186-203. See also. Ds. P. Schelling, “De enige troost in de belofte van God,” Waarheid & Recht 53 (1997): 36.

\textsuperscript{427} We suggest this in the light of clear RH parallels between Genesis 22 and John 3:16. In each, the uniquely-begotten and beloved son is offered up as a means of perpetuating the covenant. But whereas Abraham’s love-demonstration for God in the sacrifice of Isaac is stayed off at the moment of death, God’s love for Abraham, and for “the world” was carried through with the cutting off of Jesus at the cross. By this, God guaranteed for Abraham and his spiritual descendants what they could not secure for themselves—eternal life.

\textsuperscript{428} Cf. Genesis 22 with Mattthew 3:15.
Abrahamic covenant, but whereas Isaac is the first son through whom the promise shall descend, Jesus is the ultimate Son in whom the promises find their yes and amen.\textsuperscript{429}

Genesis 22 sets the stage for Abraham’s offering up of Isaac by highlighting not only the test of Abraham’s faith, but also the genuine predicament created by the reality that if Isaac is laid to rest under a shroud of death, the promise of the covenant is broken. Nevertheless, Abraham trusts and obeys God in a way that far exceeds the limits of our imagination as he binds his son Isaac upon an altar, and in one of the most climactically staged moments of the Old Testament, prepares to kill Isaac in an act of other-worldly trust. Exactly at the pinnacle of the drama, God stops Abraham, and applauds Abraham’s uncontestable faith and obedience. A ram is providentially caught by its horns in a thicket nearby—nothing less than the gift of God. Isaac is unbound, and the ram takes Isaac’s place in death. God then swears to Abraham the full-measure of his blessing upon Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 22:17).\textsuperscript{430} The place where this redemptive event occurs (Mt. Moriah) will later become the place where Israel’s temple will be built.\textsuperscript{431} Thus, the sacrifice of Isaac is a multi-faceted preview of God’s plan to bless his covenant people, as well as a preview of the liturgical and sacrificial system connected to the temple. Yet there is still more.

The sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham is bettered by God’s offering up his own Son in the fullness of time. The difference between the two events is more striking than the similarity. In the Genesis 22 narrative, Abraham is spared the agony of having to take his own son’s life, and Isaac is spared the fate of death. In the New Testament counterpart to this story, God the Father “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32; John 3:16). Just as striking is the difference for Christ, the incarnate Son of the eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20). Whereas for Isaac, a substitutionary ram is found to take his place under the knife intent on circumcising him from the land of the living; for Jesus, no such substitute is found. He is the substitute. He is the one who must take the place of all other sacrificial victims, and even more importantly, he must take the place of his people and be cut off from the land of the living in order that they might find everlasting life in him. And the Father actually goes through with it. In his love, he offers his beloved Son a sacrifice for many, thus securing for his people what they

\textsuperscript{429} 2 Corinthians 1:20.
\textsuperscript{430} This promise also previews the blessing that would later be pronounced prophetically over Rebekah in Genesis 24:60.
\textsuperscript{431} Cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1.
could never secure for themselves—an everlasting share in the eschatological promises made to Abraham. Søren Kierkegaard captures this very well:

Venerable Father Abraham! When you went from Mount Moriah, you did not need a eulogy to comfort you for what was lost, for you gained everything and kept Isaac—was it not so? The Lord did not take him away from you again, but you sat happily together at the dinner table in your tent, as you do in the next world for all eternity.432

The drama of this story is clearly the drama of redemption. To reduce the events of Genesis 22 to simply a remarkable display of human faith and divine intervention would be to flatten the text out and drain it of all its redemptive vitality.433 Abraham’s offering up of Isaac and Isaac’s active and passive obedience to his father are a divinely shaped preview of God the Father offering up Jesus, as well the active and passive obedience of Christ to fulfill the typological offering up of Isaac. That typology is appropriately applied in this context is evident in Hebrews 11:19, which states that Abraham, “considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead, from which, figuratively (παραβολή) speaking, he did receive him back.” Genesis 22 and the death and resurrection of Christ (i.e., John 3:16) cannot be properly understood apart from one another. The former grows into the latter and the latter finds its necessary backdrop against the former.

That such a relationship exists between the Old Testament event and its New Testament counterpart is not unique to the Genesis 22 narrative. As we have already suggested, this appears to be the pattern of Hebrews 11 from beginning to end. The pastoral significance is anchored in the exegetical significance. Not only were the Old Testament saints listed in Hebrews 11 looking forward by faith to the better things to come in Christ in the New Covenant; perhaps even more importantly, their very own lives were revelation of the things they were looking forward to. God so shaped the story of these saints to preview in them the realities of the covenant that would later appear on the dramatic stage of history, and thus they became witnesses to the better things which Hebrews contends have come in Christ.


433 For additional ways to preach Christ from this text, as well as certain cautions, see S. Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 201-205.
Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph  (Hebrews 11:20-22)

Less attention is given to the other pre-Exodus patriarchs in Hebrews 11 than to Abraham or Moses who follows them. But their contribution to the progressively unfolding drama of redemption is still significant. Each of them demonstrates the same principle we have seen thus far; their lives and faith testify to a longing for the future realities that will come about in the person and work of Christ. It is interesting to contemplate, given the long lives of each of the men of faith listed here, why the author of Hebrews selects these particular aspects of their lives to reflect on in Hebrews 11. In other words, how do these particular pieces of their testimony further the pastoral and apologetic argument of the book of Hebrews, and is that testimony consistent with the other witnesses in the hall of faith? We will bear these questions in mind as we look briefly at each of them.

Isaac, mentioned ever so briefly in Hebrews 11:20, is noted for the future orientation of the “blessings” he pronounces on both Jacob and Esau concerning future things (περὶ μελλόντων εὐλογησεν). It is unusual that Esau is described as having been blessed by Isaac, as the customary thought is to imagine that he was only cursed, as would appear to be the case from Romans 9:10-12. But it is not as though Esau’s life was utterly and only cursed. He was permitted by God to marry, have children, and even occupy a land.434 Perhaps more optimistically, some of his descendants, the Edomites, will eventually be adopted into the messianic family and share in its blessings. Yet Esau is still cursed in the sense that he, as the older son, personally loses both his birthright and his inheritance from Isaac. In this sense, he is excluded from the covenant line through which the Abrahamic blessings will descend and through whom the Messiah himself will actually come.

Jacob, by contrast, will inherit the blessing. Even though he is the younger son, and not even the favored son of Isaac (Genesis 25:28), he is the son whom God has chosen to bless, and the son who will receive, reveal, and perpetuate the messianic blessing. In Jacob we see the principle of God’s electing purposes which defies human reason or expectation. This principle is most clearly seen in the New Testament in God’s electing purposes by which he chooses some as his soteriological objects of blessing and leaves others to remain his eschatological objects of wrath (cf. Romans 9). In Jacob and Esau, God’s electing purposes are plainly revealed. The

434 See Genesis 33 and 36, respectively.
clear accent of God’s blessing will fall upon Jacob, and therefore he is listed first (even in Hebrews 11:20), though Esau is the firstborn. Isaac’s testimony of faith and the things promised regarding his two sons are previews of greater realities which will come to perfection in the future age of the Christ and his kingdom. In that age, the unexpected Son of promise will inherit all that his Father has promised him, and his kingdom will not come by human strength, skill, or design, but by the covenant-keeping faithfulness of God himself.

The reference to Jacob in Hebrews 11:21 is, in some ways, one of the more enigmatic verses in Hebrews 11. This is particularly due to the awkwardness of the phrase, “bowing in worship over the head of his staff” (προσεκύνησεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀκρον τῆς ράβδου αὐτοῦ). Beyond the exegetical difficulties, the intention of the text is discernible. As Jacob lies dying, he summons the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim to bless them. To Joseph’s surprise and dismay, Jacob inverts his hands, thus placing the right hand upon Ephraim (the younger) and his left hand upon Manasseh (the older). This move would make no sense, except for the fact that this is Jacob “the supplanter” who at various stages of his life supplanted his older brother Esau. More importantly, in spite of Jacob’s many foibles, it was God’s intention to bless Jacob, thus fulfilling his promise that the “older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). This unexpected nature of the coming kingdom and in particular its king becomes a theme that runs through Genesis from Jacob to Joseph, and now to his sons. It will later re-emerge in King David, and will ultimately be perfected in Jesus Christ, the unexpected king of Israel whose kingdom comes not by human design or expectation, but through the miraculous display of the power of God. It is a fitting irony that the manner of Jacob’s departure from this world, and more importantly, the history of redemption, is reminiscent of Jacob’s birth into it.

This brings us to Joseph. It is interesting that of the many good things that could be said about Joseph, the author of Hebrews chooses to highlight Joseph’s request at the end to have his bones carried out of Egypt (Genesis 50:24-25). Why did the author of Hebrews not highlight the way in which Joseph refused Potiphar’s wife, or endured a long stay in prison, or forgave the betrayal of his brothers? Each of these might have been helpful, especially with a “by faith”
introduction, but that is not what is emphasized. In fact, what is emphasized could easily be seen as enigmatic and odd, yet it is profoundly consistent with the pastoral and theological goal of the book of Hebrews.\footnote{Summarizing the life of Joseph, R. Kent Hughes argues rightly, “We have to willfully close our eyes not to see bold hints of Jesus in the life of Joseph...” \textit{Genesis:  Beginning and Blessing} (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 459.}

At the end of Joseph’s life, he makes “the sons of Israel” (his brothers) swear to him that when God visits them to bring them up from Egypt, they must carry the bones of Joseph back to the land God swore to Abraham and the patriarchs. The Hebrew word for “visit” (לְעַל) is a theologically rich term, and will be echoed numerous times throughout the Bible as an expression of God entering into history in order to bring about his blessings to his people.\footnote{Thus, “The main character in the drama is Yahweh.” \textit{Walter Brueggemann, Genesis} (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 298.} It is also a term with which the beginning of the Exodus is introduced in Exodus 4:31. Joseph’s request that his bones be carried up out of Egypt is fulfilled when God’s promise to visit his people takes place (Exodus 13:19). The fact that Joseph requested that his bones be carried up displays his confidence in the fact that God would indeed keep his promise to redeem and deliver his people to the promised land of Canaan. It is a prophetic promise of the future with typological significance. Yet beyond this, it also displays Joseph’s faith in God who is the God of the living, and a resurrecting God. The bringing up of Joseph’s bones is a symbolic portrait of the hope of the resurrection.\footnote{This is discernable first in that the term ἐκθέσις “exodus” is used of Jesus’s departure from this world through death in Luke 9:31, and 2 Peter 1:15. Koester notes “Joseph’s confidence of the being taken to the promised land after his death reinforces the hope that the believers’ final rest will be in the place that God has promised (Hebrews 12:22-24).” \textit{C.R. Koester, The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament} (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989), 500, Cited in O’Brien, \textit{The Letter to the Hebrews}, 427. See also Phillips, \textit{Hebrews}, 486. \textit{Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews}, 491-492.} Joseph knows that he is only sojourning in Egypt, and that soon his people will be in bondage there just as he once was. God promised as much. But he has also seen God redeem Joseph’s life from the pit of despair on more than one occasion, and even in death, his faith looks beyond the grave in Egypt to God’s promised redemption. Joseph’s request that his bones be permanently settled in Canaan is indicative of his faith and hope in a better exodus to the Canaan above. This future-oriented faith in the eschatological things to come is not simply the testimony of Joseph, but of the patriarchs before him as well. It is this future-
oriented faith that the author of Hebrews highlights, and through it shows the way in which their lives also display, in seed form, the very things to which they were looking by faith.

Moses (Hebrews 11:23-28)

The introduction of Moses in Hebrews 11 is rather provocative, as it does not so much focus on the faith of Moses, but the faith of Moses’ parents. Moses is only a child, passive in the event described in verse 23. Hebrews says that Moses’ parents “saw that the child was beautiful.” The word “beautiful” (ἀστειός) follows the LXX of Exodus 2:2, where in the Hebrew text בְּנֵן (good) is used. The point of emphasis in the narrative is not simply the physical appearance of Moses, but particularly the special place his parents believed, by faith, that Moses would have in the future of Israel’s salvation history. As with several of the peculiar birth narratives recorded in Genesis and commented upon in Hebrews 11, the birth of Moses is a proleptic anticipation of God’s redemptive plan for his people. Moses was born under the evil star of persecution; a persecution of the Hebrew people so great that it involves a decree of infanticide from Pharaoh himself. Yet God will rescue Moses from Pharaoh’s death-decree by the fearless plan of his mother to set Moses adrift on the Nile River in the hope that God might somehow spare his life.

We note with interest that the ark in which Moses is placed by his mother is taken from the same Hebrew word בָּאֵן (ark), which is also used of the ark built by Noah for the salvation of him and his household. As the fate of Noah and his family is bound to the ark of their salvation, so also is the fate of Moses, and arguably the family of Israel, bound to the ark that providentially carries its future leader safely across the waters of judgment safely into the care of Pharaoh’s daughter. Within moments, Moses goes from being the object of Pharaoh’s death-decree to being a son in Pharaoh’s house. Even better, his own mother is providentially selected to be his nurse until he is weaned (Exodus 2:8-9). The details of the text clearly illustrate that much more is going on here than simply a display of the king-defying faith of Moses’ parents for the sake of their good-looking baby boy. God is at work in the story, setting the stage for the

440 Cf. Acts 7:20, where ἀστειός is also used to describe Moses.
441 Though the ark in which Moses traversed the Nile river is not mentioned in Hebrews, the comparison here helps to fill in the picture of how Moses’ preservation is about more than the faith of his parents—it is revelation of how God will preserve his covenant people through a mediator who is greater than Moses.
exodus of Israel through Moses. Yet just as Moses is born under a star of persecution and narrowly rescued by the providence of God, so also is the Redeemer who is greater than Moses. Jesus is born under a similar star of persecution, culminating in a similar death-decree from Herod to kill all the male children born in that time and vicinity, and ironically, Jesus is bravely carried by his parents to Egypt of all places, and is providentially preserved by the hand of God. This stage setting is thematically intentional, and it shows the harmony between Moses and the first exodus, and Jesus who is clearly portrayed in Hebrews as being better than Moses, who brings with himself a better redemption (=exodus) into a better land.  

The next episode in Moses’ life referred to in Hebrews 11 is his departure from Pharaoh’s house to identify with the people of Israel in their suffering. It is very clear that Moses is willingly abandoning his earthly inheritance in Pharaoh’s home, and its “fleeting pleasures of sin” (verse 25) for the sake of a better, eternal inheritance (verse 26).  

What is quite remarkable is that Hebrews 11:26 says that Moses “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking forward to the reward.” How exactly Moses understood his own sufferings as being a form of participation in “the reproach of Christ” is the subject of much discussion in commentaries. It would appear that part of what Moses’ faith apprehended was similar to that of Abraham, who saw Christ’s day and rejoiced. The details of what Moses truly understood are unclear, yet what is clear is that in some way, Moses understood that a messianic redeemer would come and suffer reproach on behalf of his people. His later ministry also clearly reveals that he understood the promises God made to the patriarchs, particularly the Abrahamic promise. Somehow, Moses was able to put these things together and see in his own trials an identification with and preview of the reproach of Christ.

Commenting on this idea, Pink says, “There was a communion between Christ and his people [then], as real and as intimate as that union and communion which exists between him and his...”

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443 Cf. an analogous use of “reproach” (ὀνειδίσμος) in Hebrews 13:13.

444 Emphasis added.

445 See the list provided by Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 613-614.

446 “Such an awareness of Christ is attributed to other figures of the Old Testament by early Christians, and it would not be impossible within the Christological framework of Hebrews.” Attridge, Hebrews, 341.
people now.” In addition, Moses seemed to understand by faith that a certain reward lay ahead of him, and that this reward would greatly exceed in value any treasure or pleasure he had known as a son in Pharaoh’s house. The reward (μισθοποδοσίαν) he was looking to, according to Hebrews 11:26, is the same reward that has already been referenced in Hebrews 10:35 and 11:6, and appears to be the eternal city of God which he has created for those who love him and walk by faith toward that heavenly city. It is equivalent to the better rest or inheritance mentioned in Hebrews 3-4.

Moses’ faith is further described in reference to the Exodus in which he not only was unafraid of the anger of the king of Egypt, but more importantly, his faith rested firmly in “him who is invisible” (11:27). This verse, in our view, is more likely a general reference to the Exodus itself, and not Moses’ first identifying himself with his people prior to his departure into the wilderness. The faith and fearlessness of Moses, as well as his constant intercession on behalf of Israel, preview the faith and fearlessness of Christ who did the same. The ministry of Moses (typifying the work of Christ) culminates in the Passover event, where the sprinkled blood of the lamb stands as a substitute for the life of the people whom it covers. Few events in the Bible more clearly and effectively preview the work of Christ than the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb. The New Testament, in numerous other places outside of Hebrews 11, clearly portrays Jesus as the eschatological lamb whose once and for all sacrifice puts an end to all need for further sacrifice.

Thus, when we summarize the life and ministry of Moses in Hebrews 11, we are not simply left with a portrait of a mighty man of faith; far more importantly, we see the way in which God has designed aspects of the life of Moses to be a preview of the life of Christ. What the author of Hebrews highlights is not only the Christ-typology in the life of Moses, but also the way in which Moses’ faith was oriented to the future work of God in which he would bring about the one who is much better than Moses, and whose salvation and promises will be much better as well. Thus, in Moses’ own life, just as with the other heroes in Hebrews 11, their lives become a

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448 We base this on two reasons: the first is that Exodus 2:14 says that Moses “was afraid” when he learned that Pharaoh knew that he had killed an Egyptian. The second reason is the language of Moses “seeing him who is invisible.” This is likely a reference to seeing God work in the midst of the plagues that staged Israel’s departure from Egypt.

449 Hebrews 9:12, 14; 10:19; 12:24; John 1:36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:9; Revelation 5:12.
glimmering reflection of the very things to which their own faith was looking. Moses is not only a witness to the “things to come” of Hebrews 11:1, by faith, his very life becomes revelation of the messianic sufferings that would be perfected in Christ.

The Faith of the Israelites (Hebrews 11:29)

It is a curious thing that the faith of the Israelites coming out of Egypt is held up as an example of faith, especially given that they “greatly feared” the Egyptians, and grumbled against Moses and against the Lord. In addition, the majority of that generation died in the wilderness due to unbelief. Here again we see that it is not simply the subjective faith of individuals that is being emphasized in Hebrews 11, but the particular way in which God is shaping the faith-experiences of those listed in Hebrews 11 to be displays of redemptive realities that were yet future. So it is with the crossing of the Red Sea. In the Bible, seas (or bodies of water) are often places of judgment. The New Testament refers to both the flood of Noah’s day and the crossing of the Red Sea as baptisms (1 Peter 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 10:2, respectively). Baptism is generally associated with a positive theology of salvation (Titus 2:5) and union with Christ (Romans 6:1-4), but it also carries in Scripture an implied theology of judgment as well. Not all baptisms end well for those who are baptized, as is evident in the flood. Jesus himself spoke of going to the cross as a baptism that he had to undergo but to which he was not looking forward (Luke 12:50). In this connection between baptism and judgment, we note also that at the end of history, Satan, and all who belong to him are cast eternally into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10,15). There they are eternally baptized into God’s all consuming and insatiable, fiery judgment. This is likely the same judgment referenced in Hebrews 10:29 (cf. Deuteronomy 4:24) as the final outcome of those who apostatize. For believers, however, the absence of any sea in the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21) indicates that upon their eschatological arrival, judgment is a thing of the past, as it was climactically experienced for them by Christ, through his death on the cross (Colossians 2:11).

450 Exodus 14:1-11.
451 N.T. Wright notes that, “From at least the time of the letter to the Hebrews, the Wilderness has been used in Christian writings as an image for the dark side of the spiritual journey.” The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage Today (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36.
452 For an excellent and concise treatment of this subject, see Meredith Kline, By Oath Consigned, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 65-73. See also John Fesko, Word, Water and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), chapters 9-10.
Thus, to return to the crossing of the Red Sea, we cannot ignore what God is revealing in the faith-experience of the people of Israel—a preview of the substance of things to come. The absence of water on the seabed is noteworthy. Water does not even dampen the soles of their shoes as the people of Israel pass through on “dry ground” (Exodus 14:22). The water is walled up on either side of them in an episode that reminds us of the creation narrative where God also “divided the waters” (Genesis 1:6; Exodus 14:21). Only here the purpose is not creation but a redemptive re-creation of the people of Israel and a dramatic display of God’s judgment upon his enemies. Thus, his chosen people of Israel pass through the waters of judgment completely untouched by the water, whereas when the Egyptians enter the same water, God calls the waters down upon them like soldiers being ordered to execute offending criminals. The Egyptians are wholly consumed, wholly drowned, wholly baptized into their watery grave. This episode in Israel’s history is clearly a preview of God’s final judgment, as well as the journey his people must undertake into a redemption that carries them not around judgment, but through it. They too must pass through God’s waters of judgment, only to be found alive on the other side. The intercession of Moses on the basis of God’s promises to the patriarchs is the basis for the salvation of Israel at the Red Sea. In like manner, the intercession of Christ will be the basis for the salvation of the true household of faith who cannot circumvent judgment, but must rather pass through it by being united to the Jesus who undergoes the reality of judgment to which baptism pointed on their behalf. Being vindicated due to his own righteousness, his people will share in his victorious life on the other side of judgment with him. In conclusion, the Red Sea crossing is not so much about the faith of the Israelites as it is about the faithfulness of God. What is typologically previewed at the Red Sea will be later fulfilled when the consummate event comes with Christ and his return in glory.

The Destruction of Jericho and Salvation of Rahab (Hebrews 11:30-31)

The Greek grammar is peculiar in that it is the walls of Jericho (not the people walking around them) that stand in the nominative case and take the main verb. At best, the faith of the people who encircle the walls is implied, while the real focus of the verse is on what happened to the walls in particular. It is true that it is the people of Israel who walk obediently around the walls after the Lord promises that he has given the city and its inhabitants into the hands of the
Israelites (Joshua 6:2). Of peculiar interest is the fact that God according to the Joshua narrative tells the Israelites to encircle the city of Jericho for six days, and then on the seventh day, to circle it seven times, followed by the blowing of the priest’s trumpets (Joshua 6:15-16). When this occurred, the walls of Jericho fell down, and with the exception of Rahab and her family, all the inhabitants of Jericho were killed. This is made emphatic by the language of Joshua 6:21 which says, “Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.”

One could easily wonder how a redeeming message of grace could be preached from such a devastating story of judgment. This type of total judgment is referred to as “cherem” judgment, and is taken from the Hebrew word מַרְאֵם which is employed a number of times in the Old Testament in reference to the Canaanite cities. In Jericho, God employs the very unusual tactic of having the truncated army of Israelites encircle the city seven days, with seven trumpets being blown on the last day. It is well noted that the coupling of the sevens is intended to echo the structure of the creation week. Israel’s first conquest in the land of Canaan is Jericho. They will enter God’s rest (or as Hebrews 3-4 puts it, God’s “Sabbath”), only through the conflict of war. The same God who created all things is on their side, and will give them victory over their enemies, thus guaranteeing their acquisition of the promised land of rest. The fact that everything from man to beast is destroyed in Jericho represents a virtual reversal of the creation blessings. In other words, everything from man to beast is destroyed on the seventh day when Jericho’s walls fall down. Just as God once judged his own creative work, calling it good, and then entered his rest; now he will again judge, but this time the outcome will be the polar opposite of creation and rest—it will be utter destruction.

Jericho becomes a theater of judgment. Its inhabitants become unwilling performers in one of the saddest displays of God’s wrath in history. Yet the black cloth of death that hangs over their heads proves to be at the same time the backdrop for one of the most tender, redemptive stories in all of Scripture—the salvation of Rahab the harlot. Rahab is a prostitute in a pagan land filled with idolatry and rebellion. She is the antithesis of faithful Israel, yet in

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453 A list of such cities is given in Deuteronomy 20:17. Cf. Joshua 2:10 where Rahab references the peoples west of the Jordan (the Amorites, Sihon and Og) who were devoted to the same manner of destruction.

454 A similar reversal of the creation paradigm is seen in the plagues in Egypt, where all of creation turns upon the Egyptians one plague at a time, culminating in their being thrown into a chaotic, watery abyss that bears striking similarity to the watery, chaotic darkness of Genesis 1:2.
God’s redemptive plan, she is not only physically spared the destruction of her fellow-citizens; she is ultimately listed in the hall of faith. Even beyond Hebrews 11, Rahab is included in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:5, and is also held up as an example of one whose faith is evidenced to be genuine by the works that accompany it (James 2:25). Her faith is not only commendable, it is illustrative of those who believe the future promises of God. Like the rest of those listed in Hebrews 11, she forsakes many of the familiar things of her native city in order to embrace the better things that God has promised to his people in the everlasting city. Her actions not only commend her faith, they also demonstrate in the earliest stages of Israel’s entering the land, that God’s mercy will seek and save some of the most unlikely candidates to inherit the promises with faithful Israel. Rahab, the Gentile prostitute, will become Rahab, the adopted daughter of Israel and heir of the promises to come in Christ. Not only will she be delivered from the destruction of Jericho, but so also will all of those within her family who are found in the house with her. While the strength of all the men of Jericho fail to save the city, the faith of a lowly, female prostitute saves an entire family. Thus, we find here not only the blossoming flower of covenant representation; we also see the continuing plan of God to incorporate gentiles into his covenant family. Rahab is the only gentile mentioned in Hebrews 11, yet her role is stunning for what it contributes to an understanding of the true nature of God’s kingdom and the recipients of his promises.

Rahab is a diamond on a black cloth, set in brilliant contrast to the destruction of the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. She testifies to the future realities of God’s redemptive promises, and in this sense, she becomes a diamond set in a ring alongside other diamonds—the inclusion of the gentiles. It is perhaps for this significant reason that the author of Hebrews not only includes Rahab in his list of heroes, but also lists Rahab last (in the sense of being the last to receive exclusive treatment). Her faith experience is both a preview and promise of the better things to come when God brings not only his day of judgment that is greater than the seventh day of Jericho, but with that judgment also brings a greater salvation that is previewed in the salvation of Rahab and her family. Her voice still speaks, and it continues to testify to the better things that have come in Christ.

4.8 Summary and Conclusion  (Hebrews 11:32-40)

What follows the description of Rahab is a listing of faith heroes from the time of the judges through the time of the prophets. The author’s “what more shall I say? For time would fail…” (verse 32) implies that he could go on like this for quite a while. His enumeration of Old Testament saints could become nearly endless, so he opts for a summary instead of in-depth particulars. A quick overview reveals some surprise, as the author refers even to saints whose reputation is somewhat mixed. Of the judges, Samson is not known for his commendable morality, but rather for the way in which God grants him his climactic request to bring down irrepressible judgment upon the enemies of God (the Philistines) and himself, in the final moments of his life. The power of God’s kingdom is displayed, even in the weaknesses of the judges. The theme of the resurrection is also in view, as many of those alluded to stared into the face of death, only to walk away alive. Some literally “received back their dead by resurrection” (11:35). Others embraced the resurrection through martyrdom, and experienced such painful treatment as mocking, flogging, imprisonment, stoning, the saw and the sword (verses 36-37). Through their faithful enduring of such horrid mistreatment, they proved that they were those “of whom the world was not worthy” (verse 38). They belonged to another world—the heavenly city above whose builder and maker is God (verse 10), and through their faith, they showed not only the means of entrance into the city of God (persevering faith) but also revealed the realities of God’s redemptive plan in their very own lives (even their sufferings).

This brings us to the author’s true summary of the hall of faith, verses 39-40, which we quote at length: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” Here, more than anywhere else in Hebrews 11, we get a clear sense of the author’s intention to show how the faith of the Old Testament saints, while commendable, was at the same time revealing something “better.” There is no question that he commends their faith, and in this respect we must do the same. Yet as Horton argues, Hebrews 11 is not just “a

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457 Horton suggests this is one of the greatest ironies in history, that those who belong to God are aliens and strangers in this world because of the offense of the gospel of God. *Covenant and Eschatology*, 276.

458 For discussion of this as the final marker and summary of Hebrews 11, see Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triangle of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 595.
collection of brief stories that end with a moral principle." Much more is going in this chapter
than simply commending their faith in an exemplary fashion. Though they were faithful in
one manner or another, still, they did not receive what was promised. The point seems to be that
in their earthly lives, they died in a state of anticipation instead of fulfillment, and were thus
awaiting the “better” things to come in Christ. This is a remarkably comprehensive and
provocative statement, as many of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 did indeed at
least appear to have received something of what was promised to them. Noah saw the
destruction of the world and the salvation of his family. Abraham had children and lived in the
land. Moses saw the Exodus. Israel inherited the land. Rahab lived. On we could go, but the
point is that even though the Old Testament saints received some manner of earthly fulfillment
of the promises, they did not receive the true reality. Rather, they received a down payment
through the types and shadows revealed in their own faith experiences. Noah learned by faith to
await another day of judgment and salvation. Abraham learned to look to the coming of his
greater Son whose sacrifice would exceed that of Isaac. The other patriarchs learned with
Abraham to live as pilgrims and to await a land that would far exceed the earthly Canaan. Moses
learned to anticipate a better Exodus. Israel learned to expect a better Passover, a better baptism
than the crossing of the Red Sea, a better salvation from judgment that includes gentiles like
Rahab…and on we could go.

This is what the author means by suggesting that the heroes of Hebrews 11 did not receive what was promised. The promise that awaited them in the future was truly “better.” This same promise, according to the author of Hebrews, belongs to the church today, as she is bound to the same promise with them by faith. Both the Old and New Testament saints awaited and embraced the same eschatological realities in the coming of Christ and his kingdom, and as they could not be “perfected” (τελειωθῶσιν) apart from us, neither can we be perfected apart from them. The Old Testament saints, however, have completed their dramatic faith-performances on the stage of world history, while the New Testament saints are still on stage,

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459 Horton, Christless Christianity, 149. Similarly, Vanhoozer says, “The canon is not a de-historicized sourcebook of faith but a theo-drama: a record of the words and acts of God.” The Drama of Doctrine, 223, see also 231.
460 Trimp, Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking, 91-92. Huijser, while advocating the exemplaristic approach to Hebrews 11, suggests an analogy is to be seen between their faith-experience and our own. In the following chapter we will demonstrate that while this is approach is not altogether wrong, it may yet be too reductionistic. Ph. J. Huijser, “‘Exemplarische’ prediking,” in Gereformeerde theologisch tijdschrift 51 (1951): 11.
461 J. Van Bruggen, Apostelen, 211.
still working out their salvation, still performing the drama of redemption. They all await the closing of the final curtain, when each supporting actor in God’s story of redemption will stand back and allow God to receive all the applause as the one who has both inspired this dramatic narrative, and has also performed its greatest act in the theater of his glory—the coming of the Son to offer the climactic act of sacrifice and triumph through his own death and resurrection.

This is the something “better” that the Old Testament as a whole was leading to and awaiting. It is the “better” reality that God has provided “for us” (verse 40) in the New Testament, as the church no longer lives in the time of shadows and expectation (stage-setting and back-story), but rather in the era of climactic fulfillment and consummation.\(^{462}\) The church lives in the era of the already inaugurated, but not-yet consummated kingdom of God, brought about through the death and resurrection of Christ, the “founder and perfecter of faith.”\(^{463}\) What is awaited now is the closing of the curtain, and the gathering of the entire cast on the stage of God’s glory, with himself at the center. This is not simply the story of the Bible; it is the drama of redemption—the drama of Hebrews 11.

\(^{462}\) Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.5.  
\(^{463}\) Hebrews 12:2.
Chapter 5

Application or Imitation?
Reconsidering the Sine Qua Non of Preaching

5.1 Introduction

What exactly is application in preaching? If one were to do a broad survey of what might be considered the recognized, standard homiletic works currently available, there is one essential ingredient that would run throughout each of them. That essential ingredient is application. Nearly every homiletic work will reflect on the topic (usually the methodology) in one fashion or another.464 Some even offer definitions. Jay Adams, for instance, defines application in preaching as follows:

Application is the word currently used to denote that process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how those truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes.465

Similarly, Köstenberger suggests, “Application then, is the believer’s obedience to the correct interpretation of God’s Word.”466 T. Hoekstra, representing the traditional Reformed homiletic approach, opines, “Without application the sermon is no longer the true ministry of the Word.”467 What sermon can appropriately do without application and still be found faithful and edifying? What theological seminary’s homiletic department would do without significant reflection on the role of application within the sermon? And just as importantly, how many churches and congregants would be satisfied with sermons that neglect this homiletic sine qua non?

The following is proposed as a working definition of application: authoritative commands or imperatival language that is exegetically derived from the text for the purpose of instructing hearers in their proper response to the redemptive message indicated by the text. Though this definition is neither exhaustive nor satisfying in every way, it embodies in general

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464 “All homileticians insist on the necessity for application but argue for widely differing methods of applying truth.” Jay Adams, Truth Apparent: Essays on Biblical Preaching (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1990), 76. For a helpful interaction with Adam’s view of application in preaching, including a juxtaposition of it to the exemplaristic approach, see Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 39-43.
466 Köstenberger and Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 785.
terms the structure of covenant theology: namely, that who God is and what God has done for his people is the basis of the faith and obedience of God’s people. In this respect, and as shall be developed in this chapter, all biblical commands are based on something done by God in history. At the same time, a weakness of the definition given above is the potential for a reductionistic approach to preaching that pretends that one part of the sermon is application, and by implication, the rest of the sermon apparently does not apply. This bifurcation is not our intent, for we believe the whole sermon should be perceived as application in a nuanced sense. That said, a sermon that remains purely descriptive and is in no way prescriptive suffers from a lack of pastoral emphasis. This particular pastoral emphasis is what is captured by the idea of sermonic application. Thus, while the definition of application given above will not settle a number of issues, it may serve as a reference point for discussing what other homileticians have said about application in preaching.

In this chapter we intend to give particular attention to the idea of application in preaching, both by raising certain biblical, historical, and theological questions about it, and then by proposing a nuanced approach to application that we hope will advance and enhance the notion of application in preaching without abandoning it, particularly by looking at the biblical idea of imitation. We intend to do this by first establishing the importance of application as seen in a cross-section of standard homiletic works. Then we will consider something of the historical development of the idea of homiletic application. Third, we will argue for the idea of imitation as a nuanced, biblical approach to the homiletic idea of application, particularly as it is anchored to the concept of union with Christ. Fourth, we shall employ several examples from Hebrews 11 as test cases for our proposal of imitating the saints in a way that is sensitive to both RH and DR concerns. Lastly, we shall conclude by suggesting a few cautions regarding the idea of application in preaching.

5.2 The Importance of Application

In this section we will look at some of the standard homiletic works that establish the importance of application in contemporary homiletic reflection. For Haddon Robinson, the idea of application is essential to his definition of expository preaching. He says:

\[468\] It also accords well with Westminster Shorter Catechism 3.
Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical-grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.  

The same primacy of application is affirmed by Willhite and Gibson in their perpetuation and expansion of Robinson’s work.  Stott sees the absence of application in preaching as part of the reason for the undermining of the Bible’s authority.  Olford, following the Webster’s New World Dictionary definition of application as “relevance,” argues that such homiletic relevance “is an indispensable component of biblical preaching.”  Chapell gives a thoroughly nuanced definition of expository preaching which also includes clear reference to application:

A sermon that explores any biblical concept is in the broadest sense ‘expository,’ but the technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and sub-points that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of the listeners.

Clowney, who advocates a RH preaching model, says this about application in preaching: “As we have already seen, preaching in the biblical sense cannot be limited to bare proclamation. It is also teaching and it embraces every mode of application from the sternest rebuke to the tenderest entreaty and comfort.”  Clowney also does not believe that there is a necessary tension between the RH approach to preaching and application. So he says, “The redemptive-historical approach necessarily yields ethical application, which is an essential part of the preaching of the Word.”

In a slightly different vein, Van Dusseldorp describes the contemporary importance of the application question in Holland against the backdrop of certain failures within the RH preaching

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470 In this volume, Josh Stowell, following in the train of Robinson, suggests that the most important aspect of effective preaching is a concise, memorable application statement. In “Preaching for a Change” in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*, eds. Willhite and Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 141.
472 Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 251. See also Pierre Marcel who argues the same in his *The Relevance of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 61, 70.
475 Ibid., 80.
model to address the issues of the current ecclesiastical climate. His resolve is to suggest that every sermon is to have a moral effect upon the hearer because the preached word brings the story of the gospel into contact with the realities of this life. Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that older Dutch homiletics, such as Hoekstra, argued for the necessity of preaching Christ in every sermon, while advancing the expository model and the particular necessity of application in preaching.

A similar definition of expository preaching with application at the center is found in Mohler’s explanation, “Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible.” In Lloyd-Jones’s widely embraced view of expository preaching, application is not only essential, it is something which must be done throughout the entire sermon, not merely at the end of the sermon or even at punctuated points. MacArthur expresses a similar view when he says, “I prefer to say that all of a sermon should be applicable. If I preach the Word of God powerfully and accurately, everything I say should apply.” Later in this chapter we shall return to the idea of application throughout the sermon in the RH preaching debate in the Netherlands.

Dabney’s well-known Evangelical Eloquence is replete with references to the language and importance of application in preaching. In one definitive place he says, “The object of application is to bring the truth which has been established in the discussion to bear immediately upon the conscience and the will.” Piper notes that, “Application is essential in the normal

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476 Kees van Dusseldorp, “De moraal van het verhaal: een verkenning rond de morele relevantie van de preek,” in Instemmend luisteren, 85.
477 Ibid., 102.
478 Ciska Stark, Proeven van de preek: een praktisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de preek als Woord van God (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005), 153. Stark, interacting with empirical examples of contemporary preaching in Holland, notes that an “application-centric” paradigm exists among the types of preaching currently in vogue. Ibid., 229-231.
479 R. Albert Mohler, Jr., He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 66. He also says, “applying biblical truth to the church’s life is a necessary task of expository preaching.” Ibid., 67.
In a similar vein, commenting on the long sections of application that were typical of Jonathan Edwards’ sermons, Piper states, “It is a tragedy to see pastors state the facts and sit down. Good preaching pleads with people to respond to the Word of God.”

Thus, well-recognized thinkers on the subject of preaching seem to broadly, yet equally affirm the indispensable role of application in preaching. Still, an important question remains: from where did the idea of application come?

5.3 Historical Development of the Idea of Application

Retracing the trail of the idea of application in preaching is not a simple thing. There is no question that the term ‘application’ has been extensively employed throughout the church’s homiletic history, yet the actual and precise origin of the term is unknown. In short, the idea of ‘application’ in preaching is a virtually unchallenged part of the church’s homiletic history, yet its exact trail apparently has not been clearly retraced by any one homiletician or school of homiletics. If the homiletic theory of the church’s past might be likened to stepping-stones traversing a wide pond, each stone (period of church history) has some form of homiletic application within its purview, though they are not all identical. We believe this to be an important nuance, as application has not necessarily meant the same thing in each period of church history, nor has it been approached the same way from every text of Scripture.

This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the massive seven-volume history of homiletics by Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*. We shall shortly refer to his volume that covers the biblical period, where he alludes to the homiletic practice of application emerging as early as the books of the Pentateuch (though not referring to its punctilious inception). Foregoing that for the moment, we would highlight the fact that every one of his volumes alludes to the presence of application in preaching. In other words, in the

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484 Ibid., 96. The particular feature of this paradigm is that it is not primarily text-centric, nor does it self-consciously wed the idea of ‘exposition’ or ‘doctrine’ to the application; the focus is simply on application.
485 This writer has searched numerous homiletic texts and consulted with numerous homiletic professors as well, and no one seems to have a direct line to the origin of the term “application” as it relates to preaching.
487 Jeffrey Arthurs notes that there is no “one form” of the expository sermon, in so far as each text, as well as the varying genres of Scripture implies a variety of homiletic forms, and thus varying approaches to application. Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).
view of Old, each age of the church’s homiletic history is replete with sermon examples that include some form of homiletic application.

The story of preaching is peppered with applicatory sermons of one fashion or another. Well-recognized, contemporary pastor-theologians like Bryan Chapell, Ed Clowney, Martin Lloyd-Jones, John Piper, and Jay Adams represent this time tested homiletic commitment to application as found in various Reformed theological traditions. Carrick is right in noting that, “Traditionally, of course, Reformed theology has viewed preaching as explicatio et applicatio verbi Dei [the explication and application of the Word of God].” Hoekstra, in a similar vein states, “The reformed homileticians of the seventeenth century have repeated again and again in their handbooks that the ministry of the Word consists in the explication and application of the text.” Puritanism followed and developed this paradigm, as is well represented in the classic work of Williams Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying.* Pipa, in his PhD dissertation on Perkins’ contribution to Puritan preaching in the Reformed tradition, notes that Perkins’ view of preaching was “the chief method by which the new Reformed method [of preaching] was adopted universally by the seventeenth-century Puritans.” He additionally suggests that Perkins was the first English protestant to write a book on homiletics. The “new method” to which Pipa refers is one that emphasized application in preaching, in contrast to a perceived over-emphasis on theological content, i.e., the dogmatic formulations of protestant scholasticism. This sentiment is well captured in the words of the Puritan preacher, Robert Burns, “Christianity should not only be known, and understood, and believed, but also felt, and enjoyed, and practically applied.” It is equally important to note the emphasis in Puritan preaching on making the sermon accessible to common people (thus the “plain style”) as a

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488 Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching,* 112.
492 The significant influence of Peter Ramus, lecturer at Cambridge, upon Perkins’ view of preaching has been noted by many. See, for instance, Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 471.
means of revival. It is for this reason that the Puritan era is sometimes referred to as the “golden age of preaching.”

While we recognize and appreciate certain “new” (quoting Pipa) aspects in the Puritan approach to preaching, it ought to be observed that application in preaching is not something that the Puritans invented. They may have been reacting, in certain ways, to the somewhat doctrinaire preaching of protestant-scholasticism. Still, application was re-discovered at best, not discovered, de novo. Muller helpfully notes that this “plain style” was, in many respects, the style of the reformers, and adapted from perspicuous forms of classical rhetoric, devoid of philosophical sophistication.

Calvin, as one clear and familiar example of Reformed homiletics pre-dating the Puritans, described his own preaching in the following words:

I shall enforce myself to follow as briefly as I can the plain and true meaning of the text and without continuing in long exhortations….that the most ignorant shall easily acknowledge and confess that I mean nothing else but to make open and plain the simple and pure substance of the text.

Like those in his day, Calvin believed in application and called for such responses in his preaching. Calvin defines a pastor as one who is gifted “for interpreting Scripture, but also for applying it wisely to the present use.” Similarly, according to Calvin, a pastor is one who “makes known the will of God, by applying with dexterity and skill, prophecies, threatenings, promises and the whole doctrine of Scripture, to the present use.

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495 For an excellent expression of caution about the oft-expressed caricature of protestant-scholastic preaching as being dry and lacking application, see “Scottish Reformed Scholasticism” in Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment, ed. Trueman and Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), esp. 204-208. Samuel Rutherford is used as an example of ‘protestant scholastic’ whose sermons also evidence a warmth and clear concern for application.
496 At one point during the Reformation of the 16th century, pastor-theologian Henry Bullinger’s Decades were more influential than Calvin’s Institutes. These sermons also evidence a consistent concern for application, and for a plain style that would resurface in Puritan preaching. Joel Beeke, from the Introduction to The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Vol. 1. ed. Thomas Harding (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), LXXIII.
497 Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 340. Muller frequently employs Bullinger as an example of the Reformed homiletic approach, both for its plain style and applicatory approach to doctrine. “Bullinger…evidences a concern to link the past history of the Word with its present day use.” 464. See also pg. 83 in connection with the Second Helvetic Confession’s articulations about preaching.
of the church.” In Thomas’s 2000 PhD dissertation on Calvin’s sermons on Job, he notes that the focus of Calvin’s sermons is that we “learn from,” “profit from,” and “apply” God’s providence.” Parker describes Calvin’s sermons on Ephesians as going “straight into application,” and says that more generally, in all of Calvin’s sermons, “the application is direct and immediate.”

Thus, application was clearly a concern in Calvin’s preaching, and not something that was lost on such notable reformers in his era. Likewise, Calvin’s commitment to simplicity in preaching is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in his final testament, which he wrote shortly before his death. In this, he indicated that his style of preaching and teaching was aimed at scriptural fidelity and rhetorical simplicity (apart from any appearance of sophistry) either with his congregants or his theological adversaries. Thus, as illustrated by Calvin, a concern for simplicity and relevance in preaching was neither invented nor discovered by the Puritans, though the emphasis may have been revived with certain nuances and pastorally contextualized sensitivities. Preaching throughout the centuries is not always easily categorized, especially if these categories are being pitted sharply against other eras of church history. That there are trends and notable emphases is evident, but as Hughes Old has ably demonstrated, many of the concerns of one generation of preachers (namely, application and simplicity of style) can be found both in previous and subsequent generations if one looks carefully enough. This is especially the case with the idea of application in preaching.

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501 Ibid., 416.
502 Derek Thomas, Calvin’s Teaching on Job: Proclaiming the Incomprehensible God (Geanies House: Mentor, 2004), 226, emphasis added.
504 Ibid., 88-89.
505 John Calvin, Letters of John Calvin: Selected from the Bonnet Edition with an Introductory Biographical Sketch (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 250, 259. See also Calvin’s rather convicting comments on 1 Corinthians 1:17, and particularly, “As for myself, I do not simply confess that my preaching has been conducted in a rude, coarse, and unpolished style, but I even glory in it.” Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 74.
506 Hughes Old, The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 172.
5.4 A Biblical Perspective of Application and Imitation

In this section we would like to give attention to what the Bible has to say about the very important ideas of application and in particular, *imitation*. Our concern here is that our homiletic method (which is both a science and an art) should be as biblically based as possible. Hughes Old contends that the idea of application permeates the church’s preaching, beginning as early as the Pentateuch itself. Regarding the way in which the Deuteronomic law undergirds the roots of the Christian ministry of the Word, he says, “As we find in Deuteronomy, the law is interpreted and applied to the situation at hand. The interpretation is not a matter of historical reconstruction but contemporary application.”\(^{507}\) Clowney also notes that the ministry of the Word in Deuteronomy was not simply meant to be understood, but also internalized and obeyed.\(^{508}\)

Certain authors have suggested that Nehemiah 8 is the biblical foundation of expository preaching. Mayhue, for instance, argues that the expository method of explaining and applying the Scripture is exemplified particularly in Nehemiah 8:8, which says, “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”\(^{509}\) Arthurs contends that the model of explanation and application “…is at least as old as postexilic Israel when Ezra read the Law aloud…”\(^{510}\) Stitzinger is perhaps more guarded and correct in suggesting that it is simply the explanation of the text that is in view in Nehemiah 8:1-8, and not application per se.\(^{511}\)

Though the role of Nehemiah 8 is not decisive, we can none-the-less infer from the earliest inception of biblical interpretation that biblical explication implies something along the lines of homiletic application.\(^{512}\) The internal hermeneutic of the Bible (interpreting and applying) itself would seem to require as much. Thus, though the homiletic term “application”


\(^{508}\) Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 49.


The thornier issue has not so much been to deal with the direct commands of Scripture, though even these must be understood through the lenses of a careful hermeneutical grid. Although all the word of God is profitable for the church’s understanding and growth in grace, not all commands transcend time. To put it differently, many of the Bible’s commands were to be obeyed within a certain historical context. The command to circumcise, for instance, eventually grew through New Testament decrees into the command to baptize. The command to kill the pagan nations in the land of Canaan and drive them out with the edge of the sword under Joshua’s commission was eventually replaced by the command to lead them to eternal life with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and to bring them into the new temple which God is building—his church. The Levitical laws have been repealed under the administrations of the New Covenant, and even the judicial laws of the Old Covenant are not to be applied and obeyed beyond the “general equity” of their intentions. Thus, it is fair to say that while the biblical commands were meant to be obeyed, obedience to them was intended to occur within the

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513 To the imperatives of Scripture could be added the implications of man being made and living as the imago Dei, as well as the rhetorical implications (often left unstated) in the parabolic stories of Scripture, told in both the Old and New Testaments.

514 Familiar verses that support this idea would include, but not be limited to Psalm 1; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 1:22, all emphasizing the importance of doing the word.


516 WCF 19:4.
context of a proper hermeneutical understanding of the text. This proper understanding is not only in its grammatical-historical context, but its RH context as well.\footnote{Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 200-201. Goldsworthy later refers to this as the “macrotypology” of which Christ is the hermeneutical lens and climactic fulfillment. Ibid., 252. See also Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of the Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 232-323.}

The second, and perhaps more difficult issue, is that of using the individuals and nations described in the Bible as ethical examples, whether positive or negative. We would quickly suggest that a simple “yes” or “no” would not be helpful. As with the previously alluded to commands of the Bible, the same must be said of the narratives of individuals or groups. While the narratives of Scripture serve to aid our instruction in the ways of God and even help in our understanding of how to relate to him in faith and obedience, the question of application is not as simple as could be hoped. To state the matter positively, Scripture is replete with occasions where people or narrative events are used as moral examples.\footnote{H. J. Schilder, “Modern exemplarisme I,” *De Reformatie* 50 (1974): 41.} This is demonstrable through the language of typology. It is customary to think of typology foremost as a category of Christocentric revelation, i.e., contrasting the types and shadows of the Old Testament with the eschatological realities that have come in Christ.\footnote{Cf. Romans 5:14; Hebrews 8:5. See also Heidelberg Catechism 19. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 19:3. Geerhardus Vos has a particularly helpful discussion of typology as it relates to preaching Christ from Hebrews in chapter three of his *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, esp. 55-68.} While it is appropriate to think of typology in this way, the New Testament also employs the language of typology as a pastoral means of illustrating ethical norms being lived out in one fashion or another in the lives of people and events.\footnote{Daniel Treier helpfully notes the varying definitions and uses of biblical typology and the importance of not being overly simplistic. “Typology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 823.}

The classic example of this, well employed in the RH debates in the Netherlands, is 1 Corinthians 10:6 which says, “Now these things took place as examples (τύποι) for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”\footnote{M. B. Van ‘t Veer, “Christologische prediking over de historische stof van het Oude Testament” in *Van den dienst des Woords*, ed. R. Schippers (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1944), 157. The tendency for such exemplarism to disintegrate into abstract moralism has been often noted. See H. J. Schilder, “Modern exemplarisme I,” *De Reformatie*, 50/10 (1974): 41-42.} It would appear difficult to argue against at least some form of exemplaristic use in this verse. The question is: \textit{which is the type, the people, or the event}
itself?\textsuperscript{522} Paul is clearly making a comparison between the Israelites who rebelled against God due to the shallowness of their faith and the lusts of their flesh, and the particular pastoral challenges that beset the Corinthians. We would argue that he does so with a proper hermeneutical filter that sees a RH parallel to the situation of the Israelites and the situation of the church. The Israelites were already brought out of Egypt in the Exodus but were not yet in the land of promise. During that stage, they were required to walk by faith and not by sight, and to resist the various temptations that surrounded them, including the temptation to turn against God and against his servants in a form of spiritual rebellion.

Certain points of comparison between the situation of the Israelites and the situation of the church are evident. Bos, in discussing what he refers to as the \textit{Sensus Israeliticus}, notes that while the Old Testament was given primarily to Israel, it was not simply given for Israel.\textsuperscript{523} The church lives in the \textit{already} of having been brought out of the slavery of her sins, and is also a mixed congregation, in the sense of there being varying levels of faith expressed among her. But the church has also \textit{not yet} arrived at her final destination—the promised land of eschatological rest.\textsuperscript{524} The life of the church in this present evil age is marked by her citizenship in two worlds—the land above that she can only see by faith and the land below that she sees by sight. In this world below, there are many temptations to sin and unbelief. God’s dealing with Israel serves as a sober warning to those who are tempted to fall away from the faith by rebelling against God and his servants. But the context is also positive. It shows that Christ was among the Israelites, though strangely through the presence of a rock from which life-giving water streamed.\textsuperscript{525} Mercy and judgment flowed together, just as they did at the cross of Christ. Thus,

\textsuperscript{522} Both Holwerda and Van ‘t Veer believed that it was the event itself and not the people referenced by the term (\textit{τὰ σοὶ}) in 1 Corinthians 10:6. The exegesis of the text would seem to be on their side. Cf. Renninger, \textit{The New Testament Use of Old Testament Historical Narrative}, 49.

\textsuperscript{523} Rein Bos, \textit{We Have Heard That God Is with Us} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 168-171, esp. 170. Of particular help is the suggestion that while situational differences abound between the church and Israel, existential points of contact also abound.

\textsuperscript{524} Cf. Hebrews 3-4. For a thorough treatment of the “already and not yet” aspects of eschatological rest in Hebrews 3-4, see Richard Gaffin, Jr., “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” in \textit{Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church}, eds. Charles Dennison & Richard Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 34-36.

\textsuperscript{525} 1 Corinthians 10:2.
insofar as the Corinthians might experience greater mercy than Israel did, they could also experience greater judgment if they fell away.\textsuperscript{526}

These correspondences, in our view, vindicate the use of the idea of application, generally speaking. The comparisons between Israel and the church are clear, demonstrable, and are anchored in the over-arching DR theme of God’s redemptive metanarrative as that which binds not only Scripture together, but also binds the faith experiences of God’s people back then with God’s people now. Thus, we agree with Bos when he says, “When the apostles and evangelists open the books of Moses and the prophets, they are not mere spectators of past events. They become aware that they too are part of these stories and books.”\textsuperscript{527} The correspondences that existed between the Israelites and the Corinthians also exist between the Corinthians and those today who are a part of the same church, united in the resurrection, upon whom the end of the ages has come.\textsuperscript{528} The correspondences are not arbitrary or without notable contextual points of similarity. We belabor this point in order to highlight the fact that the Bible does indeed hold up particular faith and experiential aspects of the lives of people as ethically instructive examples for New Testament believers. At the same time, this does not imply that everything done or experienced, even by the most upright people in the Bible, should be “applied.” Aspects of their particular situations may be unique to them alone, while the call to identify with their faith is transcendent. We shall illustrate this in the next section when we look at specific examples from Hebrews 11.

Another intriguing use of the language of typology (typescripti) is found in the way in which the leaders in the New Testament (Jesus, the apostles, church leaders, etc.) are used as positive examples. In 2 Thessalonians 3:9, Paul holds up himself and the other apostles as examples (typescripti) in the eyes of the church, in that they did not take advantage of the saints, but worked hard to provide for themselves and prove to be models of servant-hood, sacrifice and contentment. Their examples were clearly intended to be followed by the Thessalonians. In a similar vein, Paul instructs Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, to be an example (typescripti) of the fruit of the Spirit before the church (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul gives the same

\textsuperscript{526} In language similar to Bos, Phillip Cary argues for an “Israelogical” reading of the text, noting particularly how the story of Jonah “representing not only Christ, the church and Christians, but also Israel and Judah.” \textit{Jonah} (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 19.

\textsuperscript{527} Bos, \textit{We Have Heard That God Is with Us}, 144.

\textsuperscript{528} 1 Corinthians 10:11.
instruction, in remarkably similar language, to Titus, the young pastor of the newly formed church in Crete (Titus 2:7). Again, the positive use of examples (types) in serving the church as a form of ethical instruction is evident, whether those types are the apostles or leaders in the local church. To deny that Jesus himself functions at some level as an ethical example would be to deny the very goal of Christian discipleship — becoming like Christ.\(^{529}\)

At the same time, we would continue to assert the caution that employing biblical characters, episodes, and even Jesus himself as normative examples requires nuancing. For instance, Jesus raised the dead (John 1), cast out demons (Mark 1:37), and walked on water in the midst of a turbulent storm (Mark 6:49). Are these normative examples to be followed by all believers? A positive answer dies the death of too many qualifications. But a negative answer only illustrates the fact that these texts need to be understood in their RH context in such away as to not create a one to one transfer — i.e., Jesus did a particular thing, and so also should we.\(^{530}\)

This brings us to the important biblical language of imitation. As has been well pointed out by others, the language of imitation is often abused or misunderstood.\(^{531}\) Hood has demonstrated the variety of abuses and over-reactions that have overshadowed discussions about the language of imitation in the context of biblical discipleship or practical theology. He says, “There has been, and still is, a crisis in contemporary preaching of moralistic sermons and church-based education for children and adults that present characters — and even Jesus — merely as behavioral models.”\(^{532}\)

Yet these realities ought not to divert our attention from language that is replete throughout the New Testament, and from the way in which the language of imitation brings us, in many respects, to the heart of Christian discipleship — conformity to the image of Christ. In the New Testament, Christians are positively commanded to imitate the following:

- **God:** Ephesians 5:1
- **Jesus:** 1 Corinthians 11:1
- **The Apostles:** 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9; Philippians 3:17

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\(^{530}\) For a good discussion of such cautions, see Kostenberger and Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 786-787.


Church Leaders: Hebrews 13:7
Other Saints: 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Hebrews 6:12
Good Behavior: 3 John 11

It is remarkable that the mimetic word group is employed so broadly and explicitly. Even where the mimetic word group is not explicitly used, the idea is none-the-less implicitly present.

Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow (ἀκολουθεῖν) me.” This command implies not simply going where Jesus went, but going in the same manner or pattern. As Jesus denied himself daily and took up his own cross, so also those who follow him in Spirit-inspired discipleship are to do the same. As Vanhoozer has pointed out, mimicking Jesus is not simply doing everything that he did the same way, but also performing our own script in a creatively spirited manner in the particular dramatic contexts into which God has placed us.

In other words, a carefully nuanced, biblical hermeneutic needs to be applied even to the life of Christ (and others) in order to understand in exactly what ways we are to follow and imitate him. We are on the same stage as the biblical saints, yet we are in different scenes; and not every action of a previous scene was intended to be repeated. Careful exegesis of the biblical text must be employed in order to arrive at fitting conclusions. At the same time, a proper exegesis of our own lives must take place in order to understand how we ought to imitate Christ most faithfully in a given context. The Bible does not live out each scene of our lives for us, so as to give us a preview of exactly how we ought to act in each scene. Yet it does give us hermeneutical guidance as to how we are to live out our lives in a way that reflects the theological and ethical commitments of Jesus himself, as revealed in Scripture and properly understood. This leads us to an important idea—the relationship of sonship to imitation.

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533 The verses referenced here are only those which explicitly use a form of the word ‘imitate.’ Hood has competently proven that the imitation pattern is encompassed in a variety of other phrases such as “be perfect as,” “walking after” and the idea “putting off and putting on.” Ibid., 84, 91, 104, respectively.

534 “Christian identity is first and foremost a matter of acting in light of the larger story.” Wells, Improvisation, 130-131. See also Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 240, 456. For a similar expression in the context of “incarnational ministry” see Peter van de Kamp, Hart voor de stad (Kampen: Kok, 2003), 299-300.
We would suggest that the language of imitation, at least biblically conceived, is based upon the doctrine of creation and re-creation in Christ. In Genesis, we are told that Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). God entered history to speak and act. His crowning achievement in the creation week was the creation of Adam on the sixth day. God spoke and acted for his own glory and man’s good. Adam was to do the same. He was to speak and act, and his speaking was a reflection of the fact that he had been made in the image of a speaking God. Likewise, all that he did was to be a reflective mimicking of his Father in heaven who was perfect. Adam was to work because in doing so, he would reflect and imitate the work of God. Adam was to rest because in doing so, he would reflect and imitate God’s resting. It is remarkable that in Luke 3:38 Adam is called “the son of God.” This term is not ontological in the sense of suggesting any sort of equality with the persons of the Trinity in se, but rather to suggest that Adam enjoyed a status of virtual adoption, in that in his creation he was fashioned in the image of God, and enjoyed the privileges of sonship in the presence of God. From a theological point of view, that Adam was patterned after Christ is clear from Romans 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:45. As a son to a father, Adam was to imitate the one who had created him in righteousness, holiness, and with dominion over the creatures.

To the extent that Adam was created with the status of sonship in his relationship with God, the fall of Genesis 3 also brought a tragic interruption to that relationship. The image of God in Adam was now a marred painting or cracked mirror, forever scarred by the original and actual sins of Adam and the sons and daughters of Adam. But this was not the end of the drama. God continued to preserve mankind, upon whom the image of God had been indelibly imprinted, even after the fall. A pattern of redemptive adoption begins to develop, as is illustrated by the hall of faith in Hebrews 11. This comes, perhaps, to its clearest expression in Abraham and Israel. With Abraham, God shows his particular plan both to redeem (and especially) to conform his adopted covenant people into his own glorious image. Abraham was called out of a world which he knew in order to embrace one which he did not yet know. He was given not only promises to cherish in his heart, but obligations to keep in his life. God specifically commanded

535 For a helpful treatment of this, see Peter van de Kamp, Verhalen om te leven: Levensverhalen in het pastoraat (Kampen: Kok, 2013), 104-107, esp. 107 where particular attention is given to the “reeds en nog niet” (already and not yet) aspects of our being re-created in the image of Christ. Translation mine.

536 M. G. Kline, Kingdom Prologue, 62-63.

537 Westminster Shorter Catechism 10.
Abraham to “walk before me and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1), and it is later said by God of Abraham that he had “obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.” To walk with God, meant for Abraham (and others in Hebrews 11) to walk in righteousness as a child and friend of God in a lively relationship. Walking with God also meant imitating what was learned from God by obeying the specific things God commanded.

Related to the imitation idea, a peculiar pattern emerges in Abraham that is repeated in the later patriarchs, and then in Israel as a nation. The pattern is that of thematic recapitulation, in which particular details in the story of one person clearly anticipate the life of someone to come later in the biblical story. As an example, each of the patriarchs at one point will reside in the land of promise, then make pilgrimage to the south into a particular context of trial, only to ascend again to the land of promise richer than they were when they originally left. Both Jacob and Joseph complete their earthly pilgrimages in Egypt (a long way from the promised land), and yet cling to a promise that God will bring them out of that land and return them to the land of promise. Joseph, though not making the same geographic trek in his lifetime as the patriarchs, none the less experiences something similar as he descends from the house of Potiphar into the pit of despair in the Egyptian prison, only to rise up again to become second to Pharaoh himself in Egypt. Following the death of Joseph, the twelve tribes that descended from Jacob’s twelve children will eventually come up out of the land of Egypt, and through great trial and temptation in the wilderness, will eventually arrive in the land of promise. A remarkable statement is made about this in Hosea 11:1 “When Israel was a child I loved him; out of Egypt I have called my son.” Israel’s being called the “son” of God implies that the narrative of the nation was in some ways an anticipation of the narrative of Jesus, the greater Son of Adam, Abraham, and Israel, who was yet to come in the fullness of history. Clear evidence of this typological correspondence between Israel as God’s son and Jesus as the incarnate Son of God is found in Matthew 2:15, which applies Hosea 11:1 to Christ, particularly in the context of Jesus

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538 "This is also the scarlet cord of Hebrews 11 and also of the letter: God will live with his children in a lively and cordial relationship.” “In het geloof draait alles om het hart” D. W. Noordzij, in Waarheid en Recht, 57 (2001): 7. Translation mine. As Johnson notes, “Truth proclaimed is both to be embraced in faith and translated into a worthy walk’ (the biblical metaphor for conduct of life).” Him We Proclaim, 84.

539 The language of “walking with God” is also rightly seen as anticipating the New Testament idea of discipleship. See Ryken, Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, 922.

540 Interestingly, Joseph’s bones did return to the Promised Land as noted in Genesis 50:24-25, cf. Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32.
descending into Egypt under a star of persecution only to come up again under a star of protective deliverance.\textsuperscript{541} The ascent of Jesus out of Egypt as an infant, according to Matthew, is seen as the fulfillment of the theme embodied in Israel.\textsuperscript{542} The pattern of thematic recapitulation moves progressively through the patriarchs to Israel, and from Israel to Christ, thus progressively revealing more and more about God’s redemptive plan and the promised seed of redemption.

These statements about the patriarchs and Israel together illustrate the way in which the language of adoption informs God’s relationship with Israel and her patriarchal predecessors.\textsuperscript{543} Thematic recapitulation and imitation seem to go hand in hand, thus wedding the RH hermeneutic with a very preachable form of application imbedded in the dramatic concept of imitation.\textsuperscript{544} This is due to the fact that God’s plan to adopt a family for himself to be conformed to his own glorious image was not abandoned with the fall of Adam. It was redeemed and perpetuated by the promises made to and embodied in the patriarchs and the nation of Israel. Abraham is not simply the father of Israel, he is a preview of the adoptive relationship God will have with Israel through his promises. As history progresses, so also does the unfolding revelation of God’s redemptive promises.

Israel is not only an outgrowth of God’s adoptive plan in Abraham, she also serves as a large-scale prototype of the Son of God who is not adopted, but is actually the same in substance and equal in power and glory to God himself.\textsuperscript{545} This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the macro-structure of the life of Israel and the life of Christ. Of each it could be said that they were foreknown, predestined, called, baptized, commissioned, tested, exiled, and restored. While the symmetry is not perfect, it is remarkably similar and intriguing.\textsuperscript{546} One cannot easily

\textsuperscript{541} An important backdrop to these verses is Exodus 4:22 where God refers to Israel as “my son.”
\textsuperscript{542} Vos suggests that the key to resolving the difficulty of discerning legitimate typology lies in whether or not there is a clear, direct correspondence in New Testament history that becomes the antitype. Biblical Theology, 145.
\textsuperscript{543} For a helpful discussion of Israel as ‘God’s son’ see Christopher Wright, \textit{Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament} (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 118-132.
\textsuperscript{544} Abraham Kuruvilla, though dismissive of the RH hermeneutic, recognizes the use of “role-duplication” or thematic “recapitulation” in Genesis and its value for application. See particularly this idea applied to the Joseph narrative in his homiletic commentary, \textit{Genesis: A Theological Commentary for Preachers} (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2014), 518, 522-523.
\textsuperscript{545} Fairbairn notes that typology is not particular to one dispensation of Scripture or another; it flows through them all, but that as the goal of the Christian life is conformity to Christ, He is “emphatically and pre-eminently the type of the church.” Patrick Fairbairn, \textit{Typology of Scripture: Two Volumes in One} (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 43, emphasis his.
\textsuperscript{546} We must also recognize here that as a nation, Israel sinned and failed in many ways, and thus, while there is continuity, there is also discontinuity. This is where the typology clearly breaks down (like all analogies). Edmund Clowney, “Preaching Christ from All the Scripture” in \textit{The Preacher and Preaching}, 174. At the same time, we
miss the intentional ways in which God previewed the life of Jesus in the life of Israel. Add to this the clear ways in which God refers to Israel as his “son,” and it becomes clear that in a sense, Israel was imitating Jesus before Jesus came into the world via his incarnation, even though they could not have known it. If such a statement might be made of Israel in the Old Testament, how much more is it true of the church—the adopted children of God and heirs of the Abrahamic promise in the New Testament?

The New Testament is filled with the idea that the church has now received a share in the Abrahamic promises, and these promises include being conformed to the image of Christ—Abraham’s greater Son and Lord. For textual support of this idea, we might consider Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This classic text has often been seen as undergirding the ordo salutis. While affirming that, we wish to highlight a few things related to the idea of imitation. First, what God is doing in his people is clearly anchored in what God had already done in Christ; the one was to be reflective of the other. According to Paul, God is working all things in the lives of his people together for a particular good. This “good” is regrettably too often misunderstood in simplistic terms and applied to material things. Rather, the particular good that God seems to have in mind for his beloved people is conformity “to the image of his Son.” This makes sense in the light of a chapter that is dealing both theologically and pastorally with the reality of suffering in the Christian life. Paul is effectively answering the question, “If God loves us, why are we still suffering?” The answer is found in Jesus. God has loved him most, and yet even Jesus had to make his way through “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4) on a trail from suffering to glory. And all along the way he learned obedience and was perfect as his father in heaven is perfect.
The church is thus called to follow a similar path, dramatically imitating Jesus along the way to heaven. If Jesus, the Son of God and the Lord of Glory was not above bearing a cross in this world, how can his adopted sons and daughters think of themselves as exempt from mimicking him in the yet-unfolding drama of redemption? Even more so, to suffer in this present evil age is, pastorally speaking, clear evidence of belonging to God and not to the world. It is the Christian badge of honor to suffer for Christ’s sake and to have his or her life conformed to the image of Christ through the means of the cross.\(^{551}\) In this context we note that the history of the church, in many ways, reflects the pattern seen in Israel and in Christ.\(^{552}\) The church also is foreknown before the foundation of the earth, is called, baptized, commissioned, tested in this world, exiled, and climactically enters the eternal land of promise. Again, while not wanting to press these analogies too far, it is important to observe the fact that there are overlapping patterns in the lives of Israel, Jesus and the church.\(^{553}\) To ignore these would be like watching a drama on a stage, all the while pretending not to see the backdrop against which the specific performances are rendered, or divorcing one scene from the next.

Ultimately, union with Christ is the necessary, non-negotiable foundation of the New Testament idea of imitating Christ.\(^{554}\) It is the grounding indicatives of God’s redemptive work in Christ, apart from which the imperatives of Scripture are neither attainable nor meaningful.\(^{555}\) This indispensable relationship between the indicative and the imperatives of the Christian life are perhaps nowhere better articulated than by Herman Ridderbos when he says:

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\(^{551}\) This seems to be the point of Hebrews 12, that through loving discipline, God is conforming us to the image of Christ, who himself learned obedience through the things he suffered (cf. Hebrews 5:8).

\(^{552}\) Herbert Bateman IV, appropriately recognized this as one of the greater tensions within Dispensationalism, and his hope that ‘Progressive Dispensationalism’ would be able to advance this question of the relationship between Israel and the church, without capitulating to the vagaries of postmodern hermeneutics. See his particular interaction with Darrell Bock in “Dispensationalism Tomorrow,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Contemporary Views*, ed. Herbert Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 312.

\(^{553}\) O. Palmer Robertson sees this as part of the ‘drama’ of God in redefining the Israel of God so as to include both Jew and Gentile, who receive the blessings and benedictions promised to Israel in eschatological form. *The Israel of God, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), 45.


\(^{555}\) Ad de Bruijne argues that that overly separating the indicative from the imperative leads to an ethical theological orientation that is sterile and inadequate. “Christelijke ethiek tussen wet, schepping en gemeenschap: Een positionering naar aanleiding van Romeinen 12, 1 en 2” Accessed on 12-13-14 from http://forumc.digibron.nl/artikel?uid=0000000001309913c915a312b2dc35a3&docid=267. See section 2.2.2 in particular.
The new life in its moral manifestation is at one time proclaimed and posited as the fruit of the redemptive work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit—the indicative; elsewhere, however, it is put with no less force as a categorical command—the imperative. Ridderbos sees this indicative/imperative relationship in Paul as being “a matter of the inner relationship and structures of his [Paul’s] preaching and doctrine. Johnson sees this as the apostolic paradigm of Christian obedience, and is worth quoting on this point at length:

The apostolic model of parenesis (exhortation) in the New Testament grounds believers’ obligations in the gospel itself, showing how the indicatives describing Christ’s saving work precede and entail the imperatives that define our believing response to his mercy.

Apart from this indicative/imperative relationship, whether preaching from the Pauline Epistles or Hebrews, homiletic imitation is reduced to a form of legalism. Yet grounded in the idea of union with Christ, imitating Christ becomes the right, privilege, and responsibility of every believer. It is a tangible expression of being adopted into a right relationship with God through union with Christ and receiving all his benefits, including the privilege of following him and bearing his cross. Imitating Christ is also evidence that we have undergone the transition of being recreated anew through union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

As we have seen, imitating God is by no means simply a New Testament idea. Persons in the Old Testament imitated God in various forms, and some even imitated, or perhaps better put, symbolically previewed particular aspects of the work of Christ. For Adam, Abraham, and the saints of old, imitating God was required, and meant doing not only what God said, but also what God did in a spirited fashion. God spoke and acted in a certain way, and part of God’s plan of redemption for man as the Imago Dei is to continue this mimetic expectation.

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557 Ibid., 253.
558 Johnson, Him We Proclaim, 42.
559 “Our default setting is law rather than gospel, imperatives (things to do or feel) rather than indicatives (things to believe).” Horton, Christless Christianity, 131. While we appreciate the sentiment here, equating the indicatives of Scripture with “things to believe” seems to ironically confuse indicatives with imperatives.
560 Burger rightly notes that “imitation does not necessarily imply participation,” as is evidenced by the commands to do so in the book of John, prior to the resurrection. However, as Burger notes, after the resurrection, to live in Christ implies participating in his relationship to the Father, imitating his love for others, as well as his sufferings and mission to the world. Being in Christ, 174.
562 Earlier we noted that Adam, after the fall, was to imitate the pattern of atoning sacrifice instituted by God himself in Genesis 3:21. This helps us to understand the rejection and acceptance of Cain and Abel and their respective sacrifices.
of speaking and acting a certain way that reflects God’s righteousness and holiness continues well into the history of Israel and God’s relationship with her. It lies at the heart of what it meant for Old Testament saints to walk with God. But nowhere is this idea clearer than when God sends Christ into the world, the one who is both the word and work of God incarnate (John 1). His work on our behalf is not only the basis of our reconciliation with God; it is also the pattern of Christian reconciliation with one another (Ephesians 5:1-2). As the love of God is what caused him to effect reconciliation with sinners in and through Christ, so also are his adopted children commanded to imitate this pattern of life, and to walk in love as his beloved people. This pattern of imitation and conformity to the image of Christ is what we have seen, to a certain extent in Hebrews 11, and is that to which we now more fully turn our attention.

5.5 Imitating the Saints: A Case Study in Hebrews 11

In what way should the saints of Hebrews 11 be imitated? This is foremost a hermeneutical question, and secondly pastoral. It has been demonstrated that the author of Hebrews has a particular hermeneutical paradigm in view in Hebrews 11. The heroes of the chapter have been called upon not merely as role models to be imitated, but as those whose very lives testify to the better things that would eventually be fulfilled in Christ. Thus, their lives theatrically display the veritable realities for which their faith is hoping. In this sense, there is a measure of typology anchored in the RH continuity of Scripture, underlying the “by faith” references.563 Thus, each scene in Hebrews 11, from creation to the perfection of the saints (11:39-40), is part of a larger dramatic narrative encompassing all of redemptive history. Hebrews 11, in this respect, is comparable to a compact summary of the entire Old Testament. Following their lead, the church (those now living at the end of the ages) is included in this drama of redemptive history in so far as her pilgrimage arrives at the same eschatological goal as Old Testament believers. This goal has been inaugurated in Christ but shall not be consummated until the closing scene of the arrival of the kingdom of God in all of its perfected glory (Hebrews 11:39-40).

563 We find Vanhoozer’s definition of typology here to be particularly helpful. In his view, “Typology is the mainspring of theo-dramatic unity, the principle that accounts for the continuity in God’s words and acts, the connecting link between the history of Israel and the history of the church, the glue that unites the Old and New Testaments.” The Drama of Doctrine, 223.
What then, are we called to imitate in Hebrews 11? The particular point of emphasis appears to be the imitation of the faith and perseverance of the saints, as through faith they not only endured a variety of trials and temptations, but more importantly, through faith, they embraced and witnessed to the redemptive promises of God. In this respect, their faith is worthy of imitation. This emphasis upon imitation is related to the idea in Hebrews 6:11-12 which says, “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” The language of imitation is obvious, and appears to have the Old Testament saints in view. The hermeneutical reasoning is significant. The Old Testament saints, like the church that received this “word of exhortation” (13:22), needed grace to persevere. Their earthly circumstances were, in many ways, a discouragement to their faith. They professed faith in the promises of God, only to find those promises remaining at a distance that seemed harder and harder to overcome. The historical gap which separated their present experiences from the promises of God threatened to diminish their confidence in God’s word. Just as the Old Testament saints were tempted to spiritual despair and sluggishness, so also are the New Testament saints, both in the first century and even today. The call to persevere by faith is not new, just as the same gospel that was preached to them has also been preached to “us” (Hebrews 4:2).

The mixed metaphor of Hebrews 12:1-3 also compels a proper form of imitation. In as much as the “great cloud of witnesses” has testified to the veracity of the promises of God in Christ through their faith, they set in place a pattern that is worthy of imitation. They looked to Christ as they ran their race, and now we too are called to do the same—to run our race while “looking unto Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (12:2). Thus, to deny the idea of imitating both the saints of Hebrews 11, and even more so, Jesus himself, would seem to do hermeneutical and pastoral violence to the intention of the text. Not only have the Old Testament saints finished their race, but more importantly, that which their faith embraced and

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564 Ellingworth suggests, “The examples must be Old Testament figures, and more specifically the patriarchs such as Abraham, who believed God’s promise to multiply their descendants and ultimately give them possession of Canaan.” *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 333. Lane sees the reference as including all of those referenced in Hebrews 11:1-12:3. *Hebrews* 1-8, 145. Cf. also Grosheide, *Hebreeën*, 152.

565 Van de Kamp suggests not only suggests that the ‘imitation’ theme of Hebrews 6:12 corresponds to the intentions of Hebrews 11, but that this idea of imitating those who, through faith, inherit the promises is the “deepest motive” of the book of Hebrews. Van de Kamp, *Hebreeën*, 168, trans. mine.
which their faithful lives revealed, has been perfected in Christ.\textsuperscript{566} In comparison to whatever things they inherited from God during the Old Testament times, Jesus is better, because he is both the founder (or author) and perfecter of their faith stories. Jesus was not above the sufferings that were endured by his people as they ran their race of faith. The book of Hebrews goes to great length to show the tender and intimate ways in which the humanity of Jesus was embodied. Accordingly, Jesus was humbled for us (2:7-9), became a loving sibling (2:11-12), sympathized with our weakness and was tempted in every way that we are yet without sinning (4:15), learned obedience through what he suffered (5:8), offered himself as our substitute (9:28; 10:10), endured the cross (12:2), triumphed over all his and our foes through the resurrection (12:3), continues to intercede so as to guarantee our inheritance in the kingdom of God (12:22-24), and inspires our worship of God in his heavenly sanctuary (12:28-29).\textsuperscript{567} Jesus is the object of our faith, and the ultimate pattern of life that is worthy of imitation.\textsuperscript{568} In as much as the Old Testament saints were revealing aspects of the pilgrimage and perseverance of Jesus, they are suitable exemplars for us. But again, this requires some nuanced qualification.

Simply put: \textit{not everything about the saints in Hebrews 11 was meant to be imitated.} Thus, we underscore the vital importance of a cautious hermeneutical approach, and the way in which only the analogy of faith can help to determine ethical implications which are normative from those which are not. As noted earlier, just because something in the Bible is \textit{described} does not mean that it is \textit{prescribed}. While certain nuances of the lives of the Old Testament saints are worthy of imitation, others are either less than blameless, or historically unique as to clearly be non-normative. A brief review of the saints in Hebrews 11 should clearly illustrate both the imitability of the heroes as well as certain ways in which their particular circumstances were unique and thus not imitable.

While Abel’s martyrdom is unique, the reality of resurrection through martyrdom is not. All the saints of God who experience martyrdom will, like Abel, continue to speak in the resurrection. Additionally, that God is pleased with and commends Abel’s sacrifice is made

\textsuperscript{567} For an insightful treatment of how Jesus not only fulfills the cry of Psalm 22:1 at the cross, but also his leading his people in heavenly worship, see Edmund Clowney, “The Singing Savior,”\textit{ Moody Monthly} (1974): 40-42.
\textsuperscript{568} We mean this not in a reductionistic “What Would Jesus Do?” manner, but as Horton puts it, “Through the gospel, the Spirit clothes us with Christ’s righteousness (justification) and renews us (regeneration), conforming us daily to the image of Christ (sanctification).” Horton, \textit{Christless Christianity}, 107.
clear by Hebrews 11:4, and picked up again in Hebrews 12:29. We too, in a manner of imitating Abel, should seek to offer God acceptable worship through faith and obedience to God’s word. And, if worshipping God acceptably should result in martyrdom at the hands of her enemies, the church must learn to submit to the Lord of her script, and through martyrdom, join the perfected heavenly choir (12:24-26) of which Abel is a part. Thus, we are able not only to imitate the faith of Abel, but even share in aspects of his fate. This proves to be the case with other saints listed in Hebrews 11 as well.

Enoch’s situation, by contrast, is unique. Though he too is a man of faith, and that faith is to be imitated, some aspects of his dramatic scene will not be experienced by all believers. Enoch was taken up and did not see death (11:5), but this fate of not seeing death served a unique function in the history of redemption, and as such is a preview of the particular fate of those who are alive at Christ’s coming and are caught up alive with Christ on that day.

Noah’s faith-experience is also a mixture of unique and normative qualities. God’s particular command to Noah to build an ark was not a “timeless truth” to be obeyed or imitated by all God’s people; but having faith in God’s promises, enduring mockery and rejection from a hostile world, and becoming an heir of the righteousness of God that comes by faith—these are all normative aspects of the life of all God’s people in every age. More importantly, the depiction of God’s judgment as that from which only he can deliver his redeemed people is clearly the goal of the text. Thus, God entering the drama of history in an episode of redemptive judgment is the real sermon theme, not simply or moralistically imitating the particular actions of Noah himself.

In a similar vein, Abraham’s faith journey has many imitable as well as non-imitable aspects. To obey God’s commands by faith, as Abraham did, is always commendable. More importantly, to inherit Abraham’s blessings clearly implies inheriting his responsibility to be a

569 See the discussion of Enoch’s situational uniqueness above in the previous chapter.
570 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
571 Köstenberger and Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 789. For a similar proposal of employing “universal principles” to form a homiletic bridge, see Hendrik Krabbendam, “Hermeneutics and Preaching,” 236-240. Though this approach is well intended, it seems to die the death of too many qualifications: namely, how does one clearly and systematically identify the “universal principles” of the text. This “universal principles” or “timeless truth” approach seems to be more of a western, rational hermeneutic than one actually found in Scripture itself. Rein Bos helpfully warns against the dangers of the “timeless truth” approach, which potentially de-historicizes the text. Identificatie-Mogelijkheden, 127. See also Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Genesis, 106.
blessing to the nations. But many of the commands God gave to Abraham were unique in their place in redemptive history. God does not continue to command everyone to abandon their homeland and move to a foreign land (11:8) or to live in physical tents as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did (11:9). God certainly does not command us to physically offer up our children in sacrifice (11:17). While there may be some form of spiritual symbolism that accrues to the particular commands given to Abraham, it must be observed that Abraham’s place in redemptive history was unique, and many of the commands (circumcision, etc.) were for a particular time, place, and people.

Our point here is that too often a “direct line” is drawn between something a person does in the Bible and our being called to do that same thing. Careful exegesis does not always support such conclusions, and a hermeneutic of convenience sometimes regrettably trumps the hermeneutic of the text, and particularly the analogy of faith. As Haddon Robinson puts it, “More heresy occurs in application than in any other part of the sermon.” Eisegeisis is often unknowingly exchanged for exegesis, especially in the application section of sermons. Ironically, in our view, to the extent that RH preaching is often (and sometimes rightly) accused of venturing into typological speculation that easily turns into allegory, the very same thing often happens in non-RH sermons, especially in the application portions of the sermon, where illegitimate connections are frequently made. In either case, as Vanhoozer appropriately warns, disregarding the author’s intended meaning of the text, whether willful or unintentional, borders on a form bearing false witness. It is regrettable that sermons on Genesis 22 (Abraham

572 Wright, The Mission of God’s People, 81.
573 While arguing in favor of the “timeless truth” approach to application, Murray Capill helpfully suggests, “Truths that God revealed to Abraham, Moses, or David, for example, come to us via Jesus Christ and the full realization of the gospel in his redeeming work. In handling ‘always’ (=timeless) truths, therefore, we must not leapfrog from the past to the present, ignoring the progress of redemptive history and the climactic work of the Messiah.” The Heart is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2014), 47.
576 Horton, Christless Christianity, 145.
577 See Abraham Kuruvilla’s critique of Clowney and Greidanus on Genesis 22, which he states rather forcefully with “All of these typological explorations render the narrative a tangled skein of anachronistic references, especially for preachers.” Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 218-219.
offering up Isaac), too quickly degenerate into sermons on tithing, asking inappropriate questions such as, “Abraham was willing to give up his son; are you willing to do the same?” Or, “What are you willing to give to God today?” We would question whether these fairly represent the theological and pastoral intentions of Genesis 22.  

A similar reservation could be stated about the Sarah narrative in Hebrews 11. While the call to imitate her faith is a natural exegetical deduction from the text, not every aspect of her story is imitable (or even commendable). Would it be right to say to barren women today that if one of them has enough faith (like Sarah), she too might conceive as Sarah did—perhaps even at ninety years old? Such an interpretative application would seem nonsensical, yet a similar approach clearly exists in the “health and wealth” or “prosperity gospel” preachers. The hermeneutics of such an approach fail to take into account what is unique about Sarah and her particular place and function within redemptive history. Drawing straight lines between the Old Testament saints and believers today is not just the occasional or extreme mistake embodied by some; it is frequently the temptation to which many preachers succumb. Indeed, knowing when to and when not to draw such lines is one of the interpretive difficulties faced by preachers week after week, and why proper hermeneutics are essential to faithful preaching—particularly the unique role a text plays in its place in redemptive history, and the light other texts might shed upon the specific sermon text.

When coming to the patriarchal blessings of Isaac and Jacob, we are again confronted with the question of which lines to draw. Isaac, we are told, invoked future blessings upon Jacob

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579 Benny Hinn for instance, says of Genesis 22, “This passage teaches us much about tithing. You see, the Father’s demand that Abraham sacrifice Isaac was in essence a demand that Abraham give Isaac to the Father as a tithe, for Isaac represented the first and the best.” The Biblical Road to Blessing (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 66.

580 Sidney Greidanus refers to this as “biographical preaching” which “tends to look for attitudes and actions of biblical characters which the hearers should either imitate or avoid.” Preaching Christ from the Old Testament, 292.

581 Hughes Old documents such trends in prosperity preachers such as T.D. Jakes. Hughes Old, The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, vol. 7., 388-399. See Horton’s critique of ‘prosperity gospel’ proponents such as Joel Osteen, in Christless Christianity, 80-91, esp. 86. The lack of sensitivity to RH hermeneutics in Charismatic/Pentecostal theology is discernable through the conspicuous absence of any reference in the section discussing “hermeneutics,” in Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, eds. Burgess and McGee (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1989), 376-389.

and Esau (11:20) and the two boys subsequently became two mighty, warring nations (Israel and Edom). Jacob, following in the footsteps of his father, blessed each of the sons of Joseph with prophetic blessings (11:21) and the twelve boys became the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. The point of this section, as with the rest of Hebrews 11, is not duplicating the specific actions of the saints. Sermons from Genesis and Hebrews 11 often seem to adopt a pick and choose hermeneutic of application, at times recognizing the unique place in redemptive history that a particular scene embodies; yet at other times, drawing a straight line between the Old Testament saint’s faith experience and our own. Our plea is for hermeneutical caution and consistency.

Drawing a straight line between Joseph’s unusual request at the end of his life that his bones should be carried up from Egypt to Canaan (11:22) would seem equally nonsensical if directly applied today. There is clearly symbolism involved here in what Joseph requests “by faith.” Joseph’s faith was in the hope of an even greater Exodus, one from earth to heaven, and having his bones carried up from Egypt was symbolic of where his true hope lay—in the land of God’s promised rest. The fact that there is such easily recognized symbolism in this text provokes the tension of application and illustrates a methodological inconsistency in preaching—which is to treat some texts one-way and other texts differently. Some heroes might be treated as direct examples to be imitated with little qualification or sensitivity to the uniqueness of their place in redemptive history; others treated with a fairly different hermeneutic, viewing the text (and particularly the application drawn from the text) symbolically, if not allegorically. Yet all of this would come from the same book of the Bible (Genesis or Hebrews) and perhaps even the same chapter (e.g., Hebrews 11). Whether or not it is fitting to employ a different hermeneutic for two side-by-side verses is difficult to ascertain. The troubling reality is that often preaching, especially as it relates to application, does exactly that.

Moses’ parents, by faith hid their child from infanticide, and thus preserved his life. But as we saw earlier, the parallels between this text and the birth narrative of Jesus (cf. Matthew 2) force us to dig deeper and to wrestle with whether or not the point of the text is what parents

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583 We agree with Pamela Eisenbaum’s opening comments to her PhD dissertation, suggesting that the majority of exegesis on Hebrews 11 has devolved into “illustrations of faith, rather than on the way the chapter functions as a retelling of the scriptural story.” *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 1.

584 Trimp seems to suggest the breadth of the scope of Hebrews 11 when he says, “Hebrews 11 wants to show the New Testament Community from all sides what the experimental power is of faith in the promise of God.” *Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking*, 92. Translation mine. See also Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 113.
ought to do in order to protect their kids, or what God is doing in order to protect his covenant people.\textsuperscript{585} Again, the answer is not so much of an either-or, but a matter of arriving at a proper application of the text through the lens of a hermeneutical process that is sensitive to the particular details of the text and its place in redemptive history.\textsuperscript{586} In this context, there are certainly ways in which the life-saving faith of Moses’ parents is worthy of imitation, but the primary focus ought rather to be upon the way in which God was preserving the life of Israel’s future mediator from death not just for his sake, but also for the sake of God’s people—a promise Moses’ parents embraced by faith.

This point flows nicely into the section dealing with Moses himself, and his resisting various temptations for the sake of God’s covenant people and ultimately for Christ. When Moses grew up, he refused to embrace the worldly pleasures to which he was entitled as an adopted son of Pharaoh, and chose rather to endure affliction with the people of God. While this posture is certainly worthy of imitation, it is inseparable from the fact that Moses did so with the eyes of his faith fixed upon Christ (11:26). Whatever he might have forfeited in this world was not worth comparing with what he was to inherit in Christ. In this light, we might suggest that Moses was imitating Christ, well before Christ had come in the flesh. Though we doubt that this was in any way something about which Moses was clearly self-conscious, it was nevertheless the way in which God was shaping the life of Moses—to reflect the life of Christ. That God continues to shape the lives of his people this way today is clear even from the book of Hebrews (particularly chapter 12). Thus, to imitate the faith, righteousness and separation of Moses from the world is consistent with what it means to imitate those who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises.\textsuperscript{587} To speak this way is neither arbitrary nor exegetically untenable. More importantly, it is not abstract from the gospel itself, but is self-consciously anchored into the RH unfolding of God’s redemptive drama.\textsuperscript{588}

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\textsuperscript{587} Hebrews 6:12.
\textsuperscript{588} In this context, Mees te Velde says, “Man is not the passive object of the developments that God, in his providence, has caused to occur. But he [man] is an actor, participant, mandated that in everything that he does he is
\end{flushleft}
How does one apply the Passover or the crossing of the Red Sea? The crossing served a unique point in redemptive-history, while the Passover was more about what God was doing to bring about the redemption of his people. Yet to be identified with the blood of the lamb was to be identified with the redemptive promises of God. Outside of that lamb, there was no salvation from God’s judgment. In this light, we not only hear the gospel, but also hear the pastoral implications of this text both for the first-century community of Hebrews and today, as that same gospel that saved them is the gospel that still saves. Outside of the Lamb of God who is Jesus, there is no salvation (10:26-31). Likewise, the nation of Israel crossing the Red Sea was unique. It is impossible to imitate their actions directly, yet the call to trust God at his word, and to walk by faith and not by sight, is consistent with the overall pastoral message of Hebrews. Likewise, the implicit imperative that we will either follow the Israelites into redemption or the Egyptians into judgment is evident (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10). The members of Israel passed through the Red Sea safely, yet died in the wilderness due to a lack of faith, and thus did not inherit the promises. Similar realities abide, even during the today in which God is still speaking a promise to those who keep the covenant by faith and those who abandon it through unbelief. The promises of salvation and judgment remain as living and active as the word of God itself (Hebrews 4:10).

The events at Jericho are unique on the one hand in terms of their place in redemptive-history. On the other hand, they reveal not only God’s sovereign power over his enemies but also the need of his people to follow after him, however awkward or perilous that may be for them. We can only imagine the reaction of the Israelites being told to march around Jericho for seven days, blowing trumpets. While their faith is imitable in a general sense, the saving faith of Rahab is even more so. Like Moses, she identified herself with the people of God, only she had little to lose and much to gain. The effect of her faith led not only to her own salvation but also to the salvation of her household. As the James 2:25 declares, the genuineness of her faith was dramatically evidenced in the reality of her works. This is an example, worthy of imitation to be sure, even though some of the details of her story are obviously unique.


589 Clowney makes an interesting connection between the Passover and the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 as a principle of redemption through the firstborn, which would ultimately culminate in Christ. Preaching and Biblical Theology, 86.
“And what more shall I say?” The question of the author of Hebrews (11:32) is very much our own. Highlighting these points of continuity as well as RH discontinuity could go on and on. They well represent both the problem and the promise of an exegetically derived hermeneutic that leads to an exegetically derived homiletic application, or better put, a quality worthy of emulation. This fast and furious race through the prophets in Hebrews 11 who endured martyrdom for the cause of the faith only underscores the idea that the hermeneutic employed by Hebrews might be applied to other places in the Old Testament as well. The implication is that this pastorally rich, exegetically sensitive hermeneutic articulated in Hebrews 11 is consistent with the book of Hebrews as a whole, and thus suggests a promising means of addressing certain exegetical and pastoral questions about preaching the Old Testament in general. Thus, not only are the saints of Hebrews 11 imitable in a nuanced sense, so also is the hermeneutic of Hebrews 11 as it guides us in the proper pursuit of homiletic application (imitation).590

It is, no doubt, for this reason that both sides of the RH controversy in the Netherlands appealed to Hebrews 11. The RH side could rightly look to Hebrews 11 and see within it a rich, Christ-centered hermeneutic that was not primarily anthropocentric; though as Trimp has pointed out, this strength may have been over-emphasized to the point of becoming a weakness in the position.591 Nor did it cave in to cheap, artificial application or abstract exemplarism.592 The RH concern for reductionism in preaching (reducing the sermon to moralistic character sketches) would appear to be supported from our study of Hebrews 11. Too many nuances arise from a careful study of Hebrews 11 to suggest that a perpetual one to one application can be consistently derived from the text. Their purpose in the drama of redemption was not simply to give us atomistic character-sketches to be moralistically imitated, but to show how their particular faith episodes were ultimately mini-dramas in the great meta-narrative of God’s drama of

591 Trimp, Klank en weerklank, 52-57. See also Trimp’s particular critique of Holwerda and Van ‘t Veer for overemphasizing the progress (‘voortgang’) of redemptive history, at the expense of God’s fellowship (‘omgang’) with his covenant people. Heilsgechiedenis en prediking, 96-100.
592 From a pastoral perspective, T. David Gordon has rightly noted that “Faith is not built up by introspection, moralism, or even cultural pre-occupation, but by focusing on the person and work of Christ.” Why Johnny Can’t Preach (Phillipsburg, P&R 2009), 76.
redemption.\textsuperscript{593} Their individual stories could not be properly understood apart from the bigger story of which both they and we are a part (11:39-40), a dramatic story in which Jesus Christ is not only the center, but also the author and finisher.\textsuperscript{594}

The reluctance of some within the RH camp that creating too great a divide between explication and application can have a numbing effect upon congregants is well noted. This was illustrated by the common practice within many of the older Dutch churches, in which the sermon was liturgically divided between doctrine and application so starkly that the sermon would literally be interrupted half-way through at the end of the \textit{doctrinae} section, at which point the church would stand up, sing a hymn, and then sit down again for the \textit{application} portion of the sermon. We would also echo at this point the sentiment of many who would not be aligned with the RH preaching paradigm (Piper, Lloyd-Jones, MacArthur, etc.) who implicitly agree with Schilder’s point that the entire sermon ought to be application, not simply a portion that stands in stark contrast to the rest of the sermon.\textsuperscript{595} At the same time, we wish to be careful not to entirely dismiss the \textit{explicatio et applicatio} paradigm; rather, we would suggest that it needs nuancing, just as much as the RH and other paradigms of preaching do as well.\textsuperscript{596}

On the other side of the RH debate, we would agree with those who argue that some form of mimesis is certainly implied in Hebrews 11. This was explicitly stated in 6:12, and seems to be implicitly echoed throughout the book. And just as the bookends of Hebrews 11 (chapters 10 and 12) seem to imply a Christocentric approach to Hebrews 11, so also do they imply that it is those who “live by faith” (10:38) with whom God is well-pleased, whose lives are dramatically illustrated in chapter 11, and thus form the “cloud of witnesses;” (12:1) whose testimony is to be

\textsuperscript{594} “When we allow Christian preaching to drift from this plot, it easily becomes a pretense for other dramas, whether that takes the form of moralism, pragmatism, consumerism, or therapy.” Horton, \textit{Covenant and Eschatology}, 268. See also Johnson, \textit{Him We Proclaim}, 53.
\textsuperscript{595} We have grown to appreciate the fact that this sentiment—the idea of the whole sermon as application—runs through the homiletic theory of many authors, both RH preachers and others. It is a subject worthy of further inquiry.
\textsuperscript{596} John Carrick suggests, “It is this indicative-imperative pattern of New Testament Christianity that constitutes the tacit theological rationale for the Puritan concept of preaching as \textit{explicatio et applicatio verbi Dei}; it constitutes the tacit theological rationale for the puritan division of the sermon into Doctrine and Application.” \textit{The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards} (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 317. While we appreciate the sentiment, it needs to be pointed out that indicative and imperative is the structure of covenant theology; the \textit{explication et application} approach to paradigm is a rhetorical style. Again we would ask, does Carrick’s suggestion imply that the “doctrine” sections of Scripture do not ‘apply?’ Or do they apply in different ways than the imperative sections of Scripture (our view). Ultimately, the whole sermon ought to be considered as ‘application.’
heeded, and whose example of faith is, in some way, to be imitated. In light of these statements, an either/or approach to Hebrews 11 cannot be affirmed, as the book as a whole does not seem to advocate such a view, nor does a careful exegesis of the chapter appear to arrive at such a conclusion. Furthermore, worth underscoring is the value of the DR metaphor as it particularly relates to Hebrews 11, thus highlighting both the primacy of the divine performance of God in and through the saints listed in the chapter, as well as the secondary way in which the role of individuals in the dramatic story of God’s redemption draws us into the drama. In this drama we are not mere spectators, but living, vital, active performers who continue to participate the drama of redemption in history.\textsuperscript{597} Horton summarizes the pastoral intention of Hebrews 11 by describing it as follows:

\begin{quote}
A drama in which the covenant establishes performances that generate not only passively transformed readers, but a new reality outside of the text-script in which covenant partners actively participate in the ongoing and unfolding performance on the world stage.\textsuperscript{598}
\end{quote}

The book of Hebrews (and chapter 11 in particular) is as balanced as the covenant formula, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 30:22; Ezekiel 26:28). Each plays their part in Hebrews 11. This summary of the covenant is embodied in Hebrews 11 as God fulfills his role of being their God through the redemptive work of Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of all that God spoke through the fathers and the prophets in time past, and in these eschatological days, is the climactic word of God in the flesh (1:1-3). He is the dramatic epicenter of redemptive-history and all the promises find their yes and amen in him. On the other side of this coin is the role of God’s people, who are dramatically called to walk by faith in the promises of God through a variety of trials and temptations with their eyes fixed upon Christ, thus manifesting that through faith, they are the sort of people of whom God is not ashamed to call his own (11:6).

Hebrews 11 is also as equally balanced in its pastoral sensitivity as the summary of Scripture given by the Westminster Shorter Catechism question three which says, “What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”\textsuperscript{599} Hebrews 11, on the one hand, is primarily interested in revealing what we ought to believe concerning God and his promises. His

\begin{footnotes}
\item[597] Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 255.
\item[599] Westminster Shorter Catechism 3.
\end{footnotes}
faithfulness to his word and to his people is explicitly manifest in the legal testimony of the “witnesses” (12:1) of Hebrews 11. The primacy of faith in God’s words and works is obvious in Hebrews 11, but also present is the call to imitate those whose duty it was to follow God by faith, thus making their calling and election sure. As some of those who were attached to the community of the Hebrews had fallen away during a time of trial and adversity, the duty of the church presently is not only to imitate those who persevere by faith, but also to *not imitate* those who fall away unto destruction (10:39).

A similar foil of pastoral imitation is expressed in Hebrews 13:17 which says, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate their faith.*” 600 Earlier we concluded that these “leaders” are most likely the local church leaders who were caring for the Hebrew community. However, even with this stated, it is interesting to note the almost vague way in which the language used here sounds sublimely like that of Hebrews 11. The heroes of the Old Testament had spoken the word of God, and the outcome of their faithful way of life was to inherit the promises of God, whether through persecution, martyrdom, or otherwise. The command to imitate the faith of the Old Testament leaders is also already expressed in the book. But in this context, it is the local church leaders who are viewed as those who are speaking the word of God, some of whom have set an example not only of piety but possibly of martyrdom as well. In light of this, their faith is held up as something to be imitated. Thus, the recipients of the exhortation to the Hebrews are encouraged not only to imitate the faith of the Old Testament saints (6:12), but also their local church leaders (13:17). 601

From these statements we conclude that the idea of dramatic imitation is unambiguously at work in the book of Hebrews from a pastoral perspective. To deny it would appear, in our view, to do violence to the exegetical and homiletic intentions of the text, and to ignore what we would refer to as the RH and DR concerns expressed in the book of Hebrews. The two ideas grow up together like seeds planted in the same plot of soil. 602 Together they set the book of

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600 Emphasis added.

601 B. Holwerda, in a sermon on Hebrews 13:9-14, seems to recognize and apply something of an imitation approach in the context of preserving through sufferings related to the war. See his “Het altaar zonder tafel” in *Tot de dag aanlicht* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1950), 48-72, esp. 54.

602 To our knowledge, the only person to attempt a clear homiletic synthesis of these ideas thus far is C. J. de Ruitjer in his 2013 *Horen naar de stem van God: Theologie en methode van de preek*. The same year, Abraham Kuruvilla published his *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*. This homiletic work also develops
Hebrews, and particularly chapter 11, in a warm, pastoral context that is full of Christ-centered exegesis and rich pastoral exhortation. If these conclusions are correct, it also suggests that in certain respects, the impasse reached by the RH homiletic debates in the Netherlands, while generating very important discussions, was also quite regrettable. In our view, it is helpful to learn from, and also to move beyond that debate to the fresh hermeneutical insights that have been advanced not only by more recent advocates of the RH paradigm, but also by advocates of the DR and similar paradigms.

5.6 Crossing the Bridge of History?

Before concluding this chapter, we would like to draw brief attention to what we believe is an important common denominator in much of the contemporary homiletic reflection, particularly as it relates to sermonic application. This issue is the tension of history. How do we who live in this present time make a genuine point of contact with the biblical world? How do we traverse the bridge of history across Lessing’s ditch? That this question is of great importance is demonstrated in one way or another by nearly every book on homiletics. It is particularly evidenced in the titles of books such as The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text, Between Two Worlds, The Relevance of Preaching, and in the very popular approach of building “application bridges” in preaching. The tension of historical distance is always felt in the sermon, as the great chasm between the world of the text and the world of today must be crossed by something in the sermon. Is it timeless truth? Circumstantial similarity? The same sin

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some of the DR themes in helpful ways. However, it seems to lean more toward a dispensational direction, and is regrettably dismissive of many of the RH authors and insights.

605 We heartily appreciate Dennis Johnson’s balanced treatment of both sides of this debate and his concern to not develop overly striated dichotomies, as is evidenced in his Him We Proclaim, esp. pp. 53-54. See also the conciliatory reflections of K. Runia, Het hoge woord in de Lage Landen (Kampen: Kok, 1985), 123-124.

604 Mees te Velde, “Vrijgemaakte vreemdelingen tussen verleden en toekomst: een nabeschouwing,” 198. Outside the immediate field of homiletics, we could list here the works of Timothy Keller, Christopher Wright, Craig Bartholomew, and Michael Goheen as those who, in one way or another, are trying to work out nuanced approaches to practical theology with an eye both to RH and DR themes.

605 As Lessing himself asked, “This is the broad and ugly ditch which I cannot get across, no matter how often earnestly I have tried to make the leap. If anyone can help me over it, I beg and implore him to do so. He will earn a divine reward for his service.” Gotthold Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings, ed. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005, 87.

struggles? Moralistic application? Perhaps the gospel alone? How one answers this question will greatly affect the approach to preaching particular texts. In other words, it is a question whose answer comes with great consequences.\textsuperscript{607}

It is here that we have found the DR paradigm to make a helpful contribution to homiletics, especially against the backdrop of the RH preaching debates over Christocentricity and application. The DR paradigm, first seeing Scripture as the living speech-act of the Triune God, allows for the text of Scripture to then function as the performance-directing script that guides the church not only into a right knowledge of God, but also of a rightly practiced performance of the text of Scripture itself. In this way, it is God himself who is capable not only of inspiring, but also preserving his word. He makes it homiletically relevant to the actual needs of contemporary hearers. De Ruijter, while helpfully synthesizing the fruits of Vanhoozer’s work in particular, also acknowledges that the drama metaphor does not erase all the hermeneutical problems created by the historical distance between the text and hearer.\textsuperscript{608} Yet this approach which appreciates a canonical reading of Scripture within a Trinitarian framework is very promising, and helps to protect not only a proper form of application in preaching, but does so within a context that is sensitive to the hermeneutical issues that develop along the lines of RH inquiry.

It has already been suggested that one of the reasons that such an emphasis on the tension of history (and thus some form of bridge-building) exists in so many homiletic works is due to an overstatement of the historical distance between the world of today and the world of the text. Having granted that there is an obvious distance between the days of the New Testament and our time, we would also suggest that in a provocative sense: there is no distance. Building again on Wright’s use of the drama metaphor, we who are alive today are in the same act as those who live on this side of the resurrection, looking for the close of the eschatological curtain.\textsuperscript{609} From the New Testament’s perspective, we are just as much in the final act of the drama of redemption

\textsuperscript{607} It is worth suggesting that while the gospel is the main ‘bridge’ that binds the Old Testament and the New Testament, from a homiletic perspective, there may be more than one means by which we draw people into the text. On this note, we appreciate the sentiment of Frances Young who suggests, “In order to improvise these essential new cadenzas, which will inevitably be somewhat ephemeral, the preacher needs skills, philological skills, hermeneutical theories, imaginative insights, and a lot of sensitivity to context. The bridge has to be flexible or it will crack under pressure.” Young, \textit{The Art of Performance}, 161-162.

\textsuperscript{608} De Ruijter, \textit{Horen naar de stem van God}, 105.

as were Peter, Paul, and the people of the time of the New Testament Canon. The days since the resurrection are the “last days” according to the New Testament, to be followed only by the climactic consummation of the end of the age.\textsuperscript{610} Rather than strenuously apologize for the historical \textit{distance} between then and now, our proposal is to strenuously emphasize (with nuances) the \textit{continuity} between those alive today and historical era of the New Testament church.\textsuperscript{611} The same Holy Spirit who first inspired the Bible has also preserved it through the ages, and in this light, God \textit{continues to speak} to us in his word and through his Son.\textsuperscript{612} It is his promise to be with his church until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20) that establishes continuity between the then and the now of history.

Additionally, the New Testament views the church today as being caught up in the same RH moment of the sending of the Holy Spirit as was the case in New Testament times, and while historical nuances obviously exist, the assumption is continuity \textit{first}, nuances \textit{second}.\textsuperscript{613} The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is still acting out his part in the drama of redemption by gathering and sanctifying a church that forms the living theatre on the world stage of God’s glory.\textsuperscript{614} God continues to speak to and through his church, particularly as the church creatively, yet faithfully, echoes his words and imitates his deeds. Preaching in this New Testament era is the divinely appointed means by which God’s Spirit continues to direct our performances. We can agree with Pasquarello, who says, “Preaching as a pilgrim practice calls the church to remember and to hope, thus forming its identity as an end-time people whose witness is in ‘looking for the city which is to come.’”\textsuperscript{615}

While the lives of the saints contribute varying nuances to the history of redemption (as is the case of Hebrews 11), they are yet bound by a common faith, common confession, and

\textsuperscript{610} Vos sees the coming of Christ into the world as the dramatic “denouement” of history, moving toward an “intensely dramatic,” climactic consummation. Yet we who live in “this age” also live in the “last days” of the age of the Spirit, between the resurrection of Christ and consummation of his kingdom. \textit{Pauline Eschatology}, 26.


\textsuperscript{612} 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3.

\textsuperscript{613} On this point Geerhardus Vos says, “Still, we know full well that we ourselves live just as much in the New Testament as Peter and Paul and John.” \textit{Biblical Theology}, 325-326. We appreciate the way C. Trimp nuances this when he says, “It is a distance within a continuum, but never the less quite a respectable distance.” \textit{De preek: Een praktisch verhaal over het maken en houden van preken} (Kampen: Van Den Berg: 1986), 59. Translation mine.

\textsuperscript{614} Calvin, in his comments on 1 Corinthians 7:31 suggests that Paul is using theatrical language in describing the consummation of the age as the closing of a curtain before the eyes of its spectators. \textit{Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians}, 258.

common hope. The same tension of history that we often highlight between the world of today and the world of the New Testament already existed in biblical times, and is even spanned by Hebrews 11 from the time of Abel to the time of the prophets. Importantly, the author of Hebrews does not apologize for that tension, nor does he build an artificial application bridge in order to unite Abel and Joshua (who lived in very different times and with different covenantal nuances). Rather, the author of Hebrews assumes a certain exegetical and homiletic continuity between the experiences of Israel and New Testament believers, as they both looked to the promises that culminate in Christ. The consequences of those who disobey in unbelief are of greater eschatological consequence today than for ancient Israel (Hebrews 10:26-31). Similarly, the promises of salvation in these last days (Hebrews 1:1-2; 9:26) are even “better” (Hebrews 12:24). Thus, history is not to be treated as the archenemy of homiletics that must be slain in every sermon before application can happen. Rather, history is that which has been transcended by the living word and Spirit of God himself and Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). There are varying scenes in this drama to be sure, and again, we are not suggesting that each scene is the same any more than each actor’s part is the same; but we are suggesting that the continuity of the drama is anchored in the transcendent God of history.616

5.7 Cautions and Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that the idea of imitation when properly understood, may offer helpful nuances to the homiletic idea of application. First, imitation has the advantage of being an explicitly biblical concept expressing the practical side of the Christian life. The idea of imitation has Old Testament roots in the relationship between God and his people, going all the way back to the creation of Adam in the *imago Dei*. Even after Adam, man continues to imitate God in various ways, and the progress of redemption reveals also the progress of God sanctifying man in the image of God. The book of Hebrews (in harmony with the New Testament as a whole) seems to develop this imitation idea, suggesting that while Jesus is the ultimate one to be imitated (12:1-2), he is not the only example granted to us for imitation (6:12; 13:7). Yet this idea must always be nuanced or cautioned by the analogy of faith. Many of the acts performed by the saints in Hebrews 11 are imitable, but some of them are obviously not.

616 More on this will follow in the next chapter, dealing with preaching in a postmodern context.
The same could be said of Christ, as he serves as an example to be imitated in many points; yet much of what he does is unique and non-imitable. Thus, particularly regarding Hebrews 11, one could suggest that faith is the main theme of the chapter, and that each hero is an example of a faith that reveals a measure of imitable perseverance, as well as something of the things to come in Christ. In this light, what we are to imitate is their forward-looking faith in general, not necessarily the specific acts by which their faith was expressed. Such an approach is relatively satisfying, but still underscores the very important issue of the need to develop a properly balanced, biblical hermeneutic that synthesizes the best fruit of the DR and RH (and potentially other) paradigms.

Our performances are to be directed by exegetically sound, pastorally rich sermons which have the power to show us our part not only in the particular scenes of life, but also in the overarching drama of redemption itself. The right and responsibility of the church is to be united to Christ and imitate him as his redeemed, adopted, children. Sermon after sermon ought to remind us of this: that history is ultimately His-story (the story of the Messiah and his kingdom) and thus not an adversary of the church. As surely as the church can be confident of God’s part in the history of redemption, speaking and acting his will into the reality of time and space, so also can the church follow his example, dramatically imitating (however imperfectly) God in Christ, thus filling the earthly theater with the knowledge of his glory.

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618 Kevin Vanhoozer argues for the necessity of studying our culture because, “We need to know where we are in the drama of redemption. The world is our stage, but culture is the setting for our next scene.” “What is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture,” in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, eds. Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles Sanderson and Michael Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 34.
Chapter 6

Preaching the Christ-Centered Drama of Redemption
In the Postmodern Scene

6.1 Introduction

In many respects postmodern thought sets the stage for contemporary preaching. It is a significant part of the context in which we live, and in which preaching occurs. Likewise, postmodernism is not simply a field of thought outside the church, but one that has influenced the thinking of those inside the church in one fashion or another. It is for these reasons that we suggest that postmodernism sets the stage of contemporary preaching, and why our last chapter focuses on homiletics within a postmodern context.\(^{619}\) How does the preacher meaningfully address a generation whose confidence in history and meaning has been shaken? How does the pulpit address issues of morality amid a generation that stands on the brink of losing its moral compass and redefining its most basic values? Lastly, from a rhetorical point of view, with what language shall preachers address those with changing concepts of the very meaning of language?

These are only a few of the challenges faced by those who preach in the context of postmodernism’s every changing scenery—including the particular challenge of defining postmodernism, a movement which elastically resists definition. Still, there are certain defining characteristics that we believe are identifiable, and may serve as a frame of reference for making homiletic suggestions in a postmodern context.

In this chapter, we would like to bring together the fruit of our study thus far and propose a few ways in which the homiletic model developed in this dissertation, while not a silver bullet for postmodernism and its dilemmas, may yet be of service to those who preach in the contemporary scene. The thesis of this chapter is that a homiletic synthesis of the RH and DR ideas may indeed help address some of the critical challenges for preaching raised by postmodernism. The particular challenges we wish to address are the problem of history, the

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\(^{619}\) It is important to note here that there are many faces and expressions to postmodernism, from blatantly secular to evangelical adaptions; not all of which do we wish to portray in a starkly negative light. There are numerous benefits to found in postmodern thought, yet there are also serious concerns with significant implications for homiletics. Our focus in this chapter, generally speaking, is upon the ideas and influences of secular postmodernism.
problem of authorial intention, and the problem of morality (the practical consequence of the first two issues). Having stated these three issues, we shall then propose homiletically sensitive responses to each of them with nuances taken from the RH and DR models as articulated in previous chapters. The first is how the RH emphasis on history and the DR emphasis on the Bible as revealing an unfolding historical drama are juxtaposed. The second is how both the RH and DR model help to preserve the idea of God as the living author and completer of history. The third is how the RH and DR rhetorical emphases might compel the postmodern hearer of sermons to see her life both lived within and formed by the drama of redemption in history, in a manner similar to what was seen in our study of Hebrews 11. Lastly, we will conclude by summarizing the chapter and stating particular cautions.

6.2 Postmodernism and the Problem of History

In this section, we would like to address the challenge of history from a postmodern perspective, and propose that there are nuances from both the RH and DR paradigms that may be helpful to bear in mind for homiletic purposes. The first idea is the importance of history. “What is the source of history?” asks Foucault.620 The answer he proposes embodies the historical skepticism of secular postmodernism. In his view, historians are biased, selective, discriminating, and unreliable. Since no one person is existentially able to jump across Lessing’s famous “ugly, broad ditch”621 of history, no one can be sure of what actually happened, and thus historical investigation, as a matter of scientific enterprise, is an illusory goal.622 The consequence of this, in Foucault’s view, is that certain value judgments regarding the good and the evil of history are artificially imposed renderings without legitimate authority. But again, Foucault asks, who gets the right to interpret history and impute moral value to its happenings?

621 “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,” in Lessing’s Theological Writings, ed. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 53-55, cited in Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction, eds. Kapic and McCormic (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 23. Lessing’s point, more precisely, is that historical facts were hard to discover and always the subject of debate. Thus, they could not form the objective basis of faith, reason, or morality. J.C. O’Neill, The Bible’s Authority: A Portrait Gallery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 20.
622 Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, 79. Hassan summarizes the nature of the postmodern dilemma by highlighting the ‘laughable’ conundrum of the triumphant existentialist who sleeps in the illusion of history but is awakened to stand and run in the reality of his own existence—a real story which is nothing other than the implied story of history. 166. Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 166.
Who can even say for sure what actually happened in history? These are trappings of a former day, according to postmodern thinkers such as Foucault. Such a pursuit of “true history,” he suggests, is a fading memory, ready not only to be forgotten, but to be replaced by an openness to the possibility that there is no genuine history, only perceptions of history. “Truth, and its original reign,” writes Foucault, “has had a history within a history from which we are barely emerging….”

French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard provocatively suggests that what we describe as reality (history) is an illusion in that no one can know what has really happened or is happening. In Baudrillard’s words, “History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth. It is by virtue of this fact that it takes the place of myths on the screen.” History, for Baudrillard, is equivalent to the experience one has in the cinema. It is not altogether real, nor is it altogether false. It is genuinely experienced, and yet projected at the same time, by the images of the camera angle defined by the subjective preferences of the historian (the cinematographer). For Baudrillard, and the recently awakened postmodern, this realization is utterly traumatic; it is both a tremendous discovery and a tremendous loss at the same time. According to Baudrillard, the truth of this reality is what sets the awakened postmodern mind free. It is liberated. It now realizes the suppressing controls that have been imposed upon it by those who created the illusion of history, and by implication, the artificial story of meaning and morality.

How did such a dire situation come about? In many respects, the answer to this question does not lie in postmodernism alone but in modernism, and in its predecessor, Enlightenment philosophy. From cosmology to morality, the Enlightenment project concluded that things could not be naïvely assumed and trusted; they must be questioned. On the one hand, the Enlightenment embraced an overly optimistic view of the human mind and its ability to see and discover truth through the eyes of reason. The mind was elevated in some ways above the soul

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623 Ibid., 80.
624 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translation Shelia Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 43. Baudrillard’s existential theory forms the premise of the famous movie trilogy *The Matrix* in which the main character (Neo) is violently awakened to the reality that his entire life is a fabricated delusion, a manufactured dream, created by a machine which has the singular desire to control him by controlling his perceptions of reality, values, and history.
625 Ibid., 44.
(the classic tension of faith and reason), with the rational mind emerging victoriously. Education, one of the broad goals of Humanism, was deemed to be the way forward in the progress of human development. The more the mind was enlightened through education, reason, and scientific discovery, the more human civilization, it was hoped, would advance.

An intellectual and philosophical chain of events followed that would further jeopardize confidence in history. While Enlightenment philosophy supposedly broke free from blindly accepted tradition, notable thinkers such as Immanuel Kant would ably criticize the alternative, as is found in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant made an important distinction between what is actually knowable to the human mind and what is not. This was his famous noumenal/phenomenal distinction. For Kant, there were certain realities that could be known in this world, but when it came to making predications about things above (in the realm where God is, etc.), such predications were ultimately only speculations. Kant’s epistemological conundrum was easily applied to history. All that can be genuinely known and meaningfully predicated is the phenomena of experience. Thus, a necessary chasm exists between the now of the knowable and experiential present, and the then of the historical past. In a similar vein, philosophers such as David Hume contributed to this discussion by noting that even the things the human mind perceives in the present (including so-called scientific discovery, let alone historical deductions) cannot be truly objective. This is because every scientist, like the historian, looks at the facts through a subjective lens, influenced by his or her own biases and presuppositions. Thus, for Hume, there are no “brute facts,” only perceived facts, whether in science, history, or elsewhere.

As it relates to the key elements of biblical history (ie., creation, miracles, the resurrection, etc.), many highly regarded modernist thinkers framed their theological arguments

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627 We note, however, the postmodern critique of the university system of education, in that the university model was built upon the idea of a coherence between respective departments, creating something of an implied educational metanarrative within a university.


630 Stanley Grenz suggests that this hermeneutical antagonism between the ‘then’ and the ‘now’ goes back to the medieval times, forming a long dialectic debate. Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 8.

631 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (New York: Hafner, 1948), 30. Postmodern thinkers capitalized on this epistemological fault line, as is seen in Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 182.
within the narrative of post-Enlightenment skepticism. A dualism of sorts developed between the objective facts of Scripture and the application of subjective ideas, particularly by a number of liberal critics of the Bible who were willing to sacrifice the veracity of Scripture on the altar of historical skepticism. For Adolf von Harnack, this was illustrated in a significant distinction between the “kernel” of Scripture (the subjective applications or existential encounters with Scripture) and the “husk” of Scripture (the historical packaging of Scripture which comes along with the kernel). According to Harnack, one could separate the two: the history of Scripture which was deemed errant and unreliable at best, from the kernels of Scripture, such as religious motivation, love for others, etc. The Jesus of history, in this train of thought, is reduced to a great religious example, while the essential facts of biblical history (whether or not Jesus was born of virgin, performed miracles, and rose from the dead) are all deemed to be highly questionable from a scientific point of view.

Rudolf Bultmann employs a similar approach by suggesting the Bible’s message could be divided into “kerygma” and “myth.” The former, in Bultmann’s view, is the subjective appropriation of the Bible’s inspiring messages; the latter is what he refers to as the rationally unacceptable assertions made by the Bible. In Bultmann’s view, “The Cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character.” To speak of heaven and hell, for Bultmann, is no different than echoing the fictitious lore of fables. His conclusion is forcefully stated, “Man’s knowledge of and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is no one who does.” Bultmann sought to rescue a form of piety from the Bible’s dubious cosmology, history, and eschatology by straining from all of these

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634 Machen notes the irony that the biblical miracles, given to strengthen faith, are deemed to be a hindrance to the skeptic’s mind. In the end, to deny the miracles of Scripture reduces Jesus to simply an ethical example, not a resurrected Savior, and thus no real Savior at all. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 102, 109.
636 Ibid., 4, emphasis added.
nothing more than existential application. This is nearly all that remains of Bultmann’s (and subsequent liberalism’s) Bible: the existential application of religious ideals, apart from any reliable history or confident authority.

In the light of such modern skepticism about the historical integrity of the Bible, it is not difficult to anticipate postmodern disillusionment, even with the attempted intellectual compromises of modernism. It was only a matter of time before modernism’s heirs raised obvious questions about a pick and choose, consumeristic approach to religion. In Craig Woefel’s words:

> The defining characteristics of this age are a lack of naïveté, an immanent and humanist-influenced conception of reality, rationalism, and the default acceptance of a tremendous variety of positions ranging on a spectrum of belief to unbelief in which choice is accepted and, increasingly, unbelief is the default option.

Thus, the postmodern marketplace was born, in which belief and unbelief are equally valuable—a sophisticated panoply of intellectual and religious consumerism.

We would hasten to assert here that there is much value in postmodern thought. It has created a renewed interest in the importance of viewing all of life through a narrative lens. It has also emphasized even more than its modern forerunners the importance of community and communal interpretation, and thus the necessity of incorporating multiple voices in theological conversation. Other positive contributions will be addressed subsequently. At this point, however, we wish to particularly underscore its genuine recognition of certain epistemological tensions in the history of interpretation. Postmodern thinkers have rightly pointed out that modernism proved to be just as biased and presuppositional as were the ecclesiastical sources they were critiquing. Even worse, modernism’s somewhat idealistic claim to have an objective ability to determine truth from a rational point of view proved to be blatantly fallacious (a

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637 Ibid., 15-16.
638 This is embedded in the theology of Schleiermacher, and led to the “reader response” approach to the Bible. See G.D. Dingemans Als hoorder onder de hoorders: Een hermeneutische homiletiek (Kampen, Kok, 1991), 71.
640 S. Paas, ‘Nieuwe structuren voor de gereformeerde geloofsbeleving,’ in Dick Houtman, Ger Groot e.a., Postmodern gereformeerd: Naar een visie op christen-zijn in de hedendaagse belevingscultuur (Amsterdam 2009), 149.
641 Grenz and Francke, arguing from a perspective of Evangelical postmodernism, suggest that this nuance within postmodern thought potentially creates a ‘place at the table’ again for Scripture and tradition. Stanley Grenz & John Franke, Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 24. This idea will be returned to later in this chapter.
critique also made earlier by Kant and Hume). Postmodern thinkers have ably noted that subjective biases abound, both for those who accept the historical claims of Scripture and for those who reject them. Postmodern thinkers have ably noted that subjective biases abound, both for those who accept the historical claims of Scripture and for those who reject them. Thus, the Enlightenment and modernism each formed their own intellectual cage that was no less biased and restrictive than pre-Enlightenment thinking.

Two intriguing examples of modern critical scholarship illustrate this point. The first is found in the so-called Jesus Seminar, which sought to determine which verses or stories in the New Testament were actually told by Jesus and which were not. A committee of critical scholars was formed with the plan of ascribing a colored bead by which they could cast their vote as to the level of confidence they had regarding whether or not a particular text was actually spoken by Jesus. It was observed, even by critics of the Bible’s historicity, that the Jesus that was portrayed by the Jesus Seminar tended to look remarkably similar to the scholars themselves. In other words, they were projecting images of themselves, their value commitments, etc., onto what they believe Jesus actually would or would not have said. The same dynamic was noted in the twentieth-century quest for the “historical Jesus.” Critical scholars attempted to find the real Jesus through their own empirical methods, but as Pope Benedict (Joseph Ratzinger) properly observed, the picture of Jesus they painted “looked much more like the photographs of their authors and the ideals they hold.” This is the inescapable conundrum acknowledged by postmodernism—all interpretation is biased and presuppositional.

History tells a difficult story. Many modernist philosophers and theorists envisioned a utopian society in which humanity would reach the zenith of civilized existence (a secular

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642 Peter Jones illustrates this point by noting that for many postmoderns, atheism is just as presuppositional and irrational as theism. One or Two: Seeing a World of Difference (Escondido: Main Entry: 2010), 134.
645 N.T. Wright concludes that such a methodology “had nothing whatever to commend it.” The Contemporary Quest for Jesus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 25.
646 Strimple later notes that such critical endeavors ended up creating a Jesus that reflect the critic’s philosophical and religious prejudices more than the text itself. Modern Search, 79.
eschatology), but this utopia remains elusive and has staged, for some, a rather hard turn to postmodernism. Nietzsche’s “death of God” theology hoped to liberate humanity from the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition and replace it with secular alternatives. Marxism was likewise a secular metanarrative built on an idealistic view of man, wholly independent of God and thus not subject to biblical authority or morality, yet it also radically failed to affect its social utopia. The Soviet Bloc would crumble, the Berlin Wall would tumble, and thus the secular metanarratives that would supposedly replace the biblical metanarrative ended tragically in violent loss. The failure of the secular metanarrative resulted in the empty space of secular postmodernism—where ultimately nothing matters because there is no longer any definitive, unifying story to history. Thus, Foucault concludes, “There is no ‘history’ but a multiple, overlapping and interactive series of legitimate versus excluded histories.” Having lost its past (history), secular postmodernism is unsure of its present existence and quite skeptical about its future.

In summary, the narrative from modern to postmodern thought reveals a heightening tension surrounding the reliability of history and its interpretation. Though many of those questions were raised prior to the advent of postmodernism, the punctuated turn towards subjective interpretations of history have left a vacuous hole in the place where objective interpretations once stood. Fearing the tyranny of the interpreter, many postmodern authors have

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notably entered a sea of historical/epistemological doubt without a life preserver.\textsuperscript{655} These important concerns should not be dismissed out of hand; especially by those who preach. Postmodernism’s historical conundrum raises crucial questions not simply about history in general, but biblical history in particular. Thus, the implications for preaching are numerous and of great consequence both inside and outside the church.

6.3 Preaching into the Historical Vacuum

We begin our response to this significant dilemma by referring back to the RH debate on preaching in the Netherlands. It must be reiterated that when the RH preaching paradigm emerged in the Netherlands, it did so against the backdrop of the modernistic, higher critical approach to the Bible.\textsuperscript{656} The historicity of the Bible was under fierce attack, and part of the RH (redemptive-historical) response was concerned with emphasizing not only that the primary intention of the Bible was to reveal the redemptive plan of God that would culminate in the person and work of Christ, but also to emphasize the importance of history. Redemption happened in history. If the Bible’s historicity could not be trusted, then the gospel itself was a dubious proposition and had no more authority than other cultural beliefs at any other time in history.\textsuperscript{657} This apologetic context is often lost by those who tend to treat and criticize the RH preaching paradigm as simply being an over-emphasis on theocentric history to the exclusion of homiletic application. The RH discussion, in many respects, cannot be properly and charitably understood without sensitivity to the battle for biblical history that contextualized so much of those debates.\textsuperscript{658} The response for those within the RH vein of thinking was that history (even common grace history) was the story of Jesus and his kingdom. If this was true of general revelation, much more was it affirmed regarding special revelation (Scripture). Special revelation is the history of the incarnation, and as Christ himself was a historical person, special

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{655} This “sea of doubt” is a pun on modernism’s “sea of faith” as described in Anthony Thiselton, \textit{Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise} (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995), 81.
\item \textsuperscript{656} See C.J. de Ruijter, “Heil en historie” in \textit{De Reformatie} 3 (15 October, 1994): 46-49.
\item \textsuperscript{657} Outside the RH preaching discussion, the same point is made in the context of apologetics. See John Feinberg, \textit{Can You Believe It’s True? Christian Apologetics in a Modern and Postmodern Era} (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 73.
\item \textsuperscript{658} J. Veenhof illustrates that the hermeneutical, theological and ethical construct of Herman Bavinck, upon whose shoulders the RH pioneers were standing, were themselves shaped by the reaction to rationalism’s attempt to de-historicize Scripture. \textit{Revelatie en inspiratie: De openbarings-en schrifbeschouwing van Herman Bavinck in vergelijking met die der ethische theologie} (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 11,19.
\end{itemize}
revelation must be both historical and Christ-centered by nature. Bavinck saw the New Testament apostles affirming the historicity and authority of the Old Testament for the way in which it testified to the coming of God in the person of Jesus Christ, and his incarnation into history as that which bound together the two testaments (old and new) and the two peoples of God (Israel and the church).

Thus, even though the immediate historical context of the development of the RH preaching paradigm is not postmodernism, it still makes a meaningful contribution to the discussion about contemporary preaching in a postmodern context as it focuses homiletic attention on the importance of biblical history from a narrative perspective. While its epistemology and methodology differ, secular postmodernism’s suspicion of history is similar to the suspicion expressed in earlier, modernistic discussions about the reliability of the Bible’s history. As Paul Ricoeur has admitted, “Revelation is a historical process, but the notion of a sacred text is something anti-historical. I am frightened by this word ‘sacred.’” Thus, we would suggest that to the extent in which secular postmodernism is simply repackaging many of modernism’s earlier concerns about the reliability of biblical history, preachers would do well to reconsider the way in which defenders of biblical history have responded to the similar challenges of modernism, as the former clearly builds upon the latter. This certainly includes the earlier first responders to the crisis, among whom were some of the RH pioneers.

Additionally, we would suggest that this concern to defend the truthfulness of biblical history is what characterized much of the ministry of important figures that are not necessarily connected to preaching itself, such as Vos and Ridderbos. Both men interacted heavily with the critics of biblical history and did so with a hermeneutical method that has been categorized as

659 Ibid., 834.
660 Herman Bavinck, Gereformeerde dogmatiek, Deel I (Kampen: Kok, 1928), 372-373.
661 J. Gresham Machen, with a prescience well ahead of his time, noted that for modernistic-liberal approaches to the Bible, “The only authority can be individual experience; truth can only be that which ‘helps’ individual man. Such authority is no authority at all.” Christianity and Liberalism, 78.
662 Ricoeur, Figuring the Sacred, 72, emphasis added.
663 Trimp notes that the rejection of “exemplarism” of Holwerda and Veenhof was inseparable from the rejection of the religious subjectivism of the day, and that it was in the midst of this fray that the RH preaching paradigm arose. Trimp, Heilsgeschiedenis en prediking, 109-110.
RH. It is quite likely that one of the reasons why there has been a surge of interest, especially in North America, in these Dutch theologians has to do with the challenges to biblical history, many of which stem from postmodern thought. Williams expresses this well in saying:

The Vosian insight that the Bible is, by its very nature, a narrative, telling of the drama of redemption, that the story the Bible tells is what unifies the biblical text, and that the Bible is to be read looking for that history, is essential to the new energy in evangelical theology.665

Thus, from a narrowly homiletic and broadly hermeneutic point of view, the RH paradigm of preaching and exegesis offers something apologetically helpful to the current discussion about preaching in a postmodern context. This is especially true as it highlights the historical unity and continuity of the Bible via the gospel as the thread which binds together the pages of biblical history. This confidence in a unifying history is the message which needs to be echoed repeatedly and confidently in preaching, especially in our postmodern context. Telling and retelling the historical story of redemption lies at the heart of preaching. Though persuading listeners of the truthfulness of this account is ultimately not a purely intellectual issues (it is a matter of faith wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit); none-the-less, the Bible’s approach to cultivating faith is through the means of proclaiming the gospel through the lens of history.666 This approach to preaching, though seemingly simplistic, is suggested by Larsen as an alternative to discussions about the Bible’s origin, and a renewed focus on telling the story of Scripture itself in preaching.667

Biblical history, according to the RH point of view, is nothing less than the covenantal activity of God by which redemption is accomplished in space and time. The Bible, as a result, cannot be reduced to simple, timeless truths, apart from the historical context in which those truths were revealed and by which the same truths are contextualized. In a similar manner, neither can any sort of existential encounter with God be abstracted from the history of Scripture apart from a genuine respect for the actual history in which God first revealed himself to his

666 This is well embodied in the preaching of the book of Acts (2, 6, 13, for example) and elsewhere. In this sense, we are affirming the language of Romans 10:17, “So Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (ESV).
people and the means by which he established a covenantal relationship with them. This is true for modern thinkers like Bultmann and Harnack, but also for postmodern thinkers, including evangelicals who too readily abandon the importance of biblical history for application oriented thinking, and thus sound strangely like Bultmann and Harnack. 668

Creation, fall, and redemption remain the abiding historical context of biblical revelation. Not only is biblical history meaningless apart from a genuine recognition of these historical events; contemporary history, as secular postmodernism has rightly concluded, has lost its rudder as well. If the Bible’s historicity is not preached and believed, the wandering roots of postmodernism will only grow wider and deeper, suffocating the very life (identity) out of its adherents. RH preaching, at its best, emphasizes the importance of seeing God as the Lord of history and the primary subject of the biblical text. 669 That there have been extremes and weaknesses within the movement (both old and new) is sure. 670 It might be suggested that a charitable way to judge the lasting benefits of the RH movement is not to measure it by its extremes, or at times immature expressions (many of which abound today), but by the pastoral context in which it arose and the extent to which it was able to meet the pertinent challenges of its day. The modernistic skepticism about the canon’s historicity and objectivity that formed the backdrop of the RH discussion in the Netherlands has come to an even stronger expression in recent years. 671 Thus, it may prove helpful to suggest a renewed emphasis on the importance of biblical history and a wariness of attempts at homiletic application that abstract such applications from the text, rather than anchor them emphatically and self-consciously in the covenantal and historical details of the text. Imperatives apart from historically accomplished indicatives are

668 Horton, Covenant and Eschatology, 265.
669 K. Schilder and many RH advocates emphasized that Salvation happens in history, and thus there is a sense in which all history is ultimately part of redemptive history. See P. Veldhuizen, God en mens onderweg: Hoofdmomenten uit de theologische geschiedbeschouwing van Klaas Schilder (Leiden: J.J. Groen en zoon, 1995), 107-108.
670 In the Dutch debates, RH thinkers accused their ‘exemplaristic’ opponents of fragmenting history into disconnected and arbitrarily imposed categories that violated the place in history of the biblical text. Cf. Renninger, The New Testament Use of the Old Testament, 53. Greidanus has pointed out that the same critique could be made against the Dutch RH advocates (ie, Schilder) of Schematism, speculation and objective preaching. Sola Scriptura, 211. For instance, K. Schilder argued strenuously for the importance of locating the line of history in preaching. Cf. “Iets over de eenheid der ‘Heilsgeschiedenis’ in verband met de prediking I” De Reformatie, 11 (1931): 366. However, the Old Testament books do not form a straight historical line, so to speak; nor do the New Testament synoptic gospels tell the same stories in exactly the same order. Ironically, the methodology employed by many in the Dutch RH camp were often no less guilty of schematizing than their exemplaristic counterparts. Cf. Greidanus, Sola Scriptura, 203-205.
671 Martin Schreurs, Postmodern Bildung (PhD dissertation, Universiteit Utrecht, 2003), 291.
simply abstracted, timeless moralisms—the fodder of liberal preaching which will, in the end, lead to postmodern skepticism.\(^{672}\)

Along these lines, as we have highlighted throughout this dissertation, there is a thought-provoking measure of overlap between the RH and DR ideas. The former looks at the Bible as a unified historical narrative that focuses upon God and historical revelation from creation, to redemption, to consummation. The latter, we believe, overlaps but also develops the former. This is particularly evident in that the DR paradigm sees a profound unity in all of biblical history. It also argues that God is the primary actor revealed within the Bible’s grand drama (covenant metanarrative), with the church playing a supportive, yet important role.

One of the most notable things frequently missing in the RH homiletic model is a greater sensitivity to the role of the reader/recipient of the biblical message in the context of preaching. This weakness has been acknowledged both by critics of the RH preaching paradigm as well as by its advocates.\(^{673}\) In many ways, nuances of postmodern thought have helped the homiletic discussion by forcing the question of the reader/hearer’s role as part of the Bible’s unfolding story, and by revitalizing the importance of seeing life from a narrative point of view.\(^{674}\) We don’t simply read stories; we live them. It is important to note that while the postmodern turn to the reader has had negative affects, at the same time, it has placed a helpful emphasis upon the role of the reader—a thought factor that is remarkably important in homiletic discussions.

In his development of the DR idea, Vanhoozer has been effective at creatively responding to the criticisms of postmodernity, and has also helpfully recognized that some of postmodernity’s criticisms are legitimate and its advances helpful. Vanhoozer’s critique of “epic” approaches to systematic theology (that it simply tells the Bible’s content in an encyclopedic manner) might be leveled at the RH model of preaching (simply telling the story of redemption to passive readers/listeners, without giving due attention to the importance of the one hearing the sermon and the idea of living the drama). At the same time, Horton, perhaps as

\(^{672}\) Machen observed that liberal preaching which divorced historical indicatives from moral imperatives was, in reality, “rejecting the whole basis of Christianity.” *Christianity and Liberalism*, 47. As Dorothy Sayers also noted in the same time period, such an emphasis on morality apart from history and doctrine would inevitably fail to convict and arouse. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, 20.

\(^{673}\) C.J. de Ruijter, while noting the benefit of the RH method of preaching, also notes its dramatic failure to properly pay attention to the needs of hearers of sermons. He thus argues to remember the RH method, but also to remember the hearers of sermons as well. “Herkenning en heilshistorie,” in *De Reformatie* 3 (1994): esp. 44. Cf. Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 242.

\(^{674}\) De Ruijter, *Horen naar de stem van God*, 164-167.
much if not more than Vanhoozer, has noted that the evangelical pre-occupation with application in preaching has had the same effect as rolling the Trojan horse into the city of Troy. The abstraction of moralistic truths from their historical context, and the over-emphasis on man’s response to the expense of God’s prior activities, has caused conservative protestant pulpits and their liberal-protestant counterparts to sound remarkably similar. In much of evangelical preaching, “What would Jesus do?” has effectively taken the place of “What did Jesus do” in history. It is here again we find that the historical emphasis of RH preaching may be worth reconsidering, and the furthering nuances of the DR paradigm may also prove helpful, particularly the nuance of seeing the Bible as revealing not simply a story to be told in epical fashion, but a drama to be participated in upon the world stage of history. Where evangelical preaching de-emphasizes history and over-emphasizes application, it stands poised to fuel the skeptical fire of postmodernism in much the same way that protestant liberalism did. This leads us to consider whether or not the Bible’s historical message can be trusted.

6.4 Is There an Author Behind This Text?

Secular postmodernism and, in a nuanced way, evangelical postmodernism, have struggled with the idea of foundationalism, a problem that manifests itself in the issue of authorial intention. Grenz and Francke suggest that, “Among philosophers today, foundationalism is in dramatic retreat.” If the objective facts of history lie on the other side of a ditch which cannot be crossed, how can one be sure not simply about the authorship of various works, but perhaps more importantly, the authoritative meaning of the words authors have left behind? This question was not simply pressed upon theological discussions, but perhaps in an equally leveling way, manifested itself in literary criticism. Nietzsche’s “death of God” theology and similar strands of deconstruction trickled down into what became known as the “death of the author” paradigm within the world of literature. As Steiner notes, “For deconstruction, however, there can be no foundational speech-act, no saying immune from un-saying. This is the crux.” This important idea can be illustrated through a number of authors.

675 Grenz and Francke, Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context, 38.
676 Howard Felperin, Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 104. For a fuller treatment of Nietzsche in particular, see “Nietzsche, Genealogy and History,” in The Foucault Reader, ed. Rabinow, 76-100, esp. 78.
Roland Barthes, in his famous article “The Death of the Author,” makes the point that the idea of an authoritative author is passé and futile. He says, “It is language that speaks, not the author.”678 The point is that an author, at most, is behind the text, in a world to which we do not have direct access, and therefore in a world of ideas of which we cannot be certain. All that we can be sure of is the immanent language of a text that is left behind by the so-called author, which is to be interpreted and applied by the reader. The reader remains, but the author is lost. Barthes faults the classical approach to literature for granting literary works Bible-like status of unquestioned authorship and discernible, implied meaning.679 Even worse, according to Barthes, the classical model of literary criticism focused so strongly upon what the author intended a text to mean, that the reader was largely ignored (a problem postmodernism would seek to redress). Many authors have rightly noted that language is a two-sided engagement embodying the activity of the speaker as well as the activity of the reader/hearer.680 The question remains: to what extent can the author’s intention be known?

In a related manner, evangelical postmoderns have suggested that the concept of biblical inerrancy is derived from a post-enlightenment pursuit that sought to create an impenetrable (and logical) fortress from which orthodox truths might be defended.681 From this flowed the idea that all that had to be done in order to properly understand the particular meaning of texts was to determine the “original meaning” of the text to the author and its readership. Yet according to postmodern theorists, to the extent that the intentions of an author might be perceived as knowable, they still remain elusive and subject to interpretation and revision.682 The “world of the text,” a term frequently employed by postmodern literary theorists,683 is an unknowable

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679 Ibid., 1324.
681 Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 190. Princeton theologians such as Charles and A. A. Hodge are often referenced as those who fortified the conservative ‘foundational’ doctrine of inerrancy in the context of defending Scripture against the higher critics. Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 16. See also a helpful summary on 35. For a rebuttal of the idea that post-enlightenment thinkers (or Old Princetonians) invented a higher view of Scripture than was previously taught, see D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 153-154.
world. Gadamer, building on what Plato referred to as the “helplessness of the written word” says, “The understanding of something written is not the repetition of something past but the sharing of a present meaning.” In this rather extreme view, the present meaning of a text is defined not by the authors of texts but by the readers of texts. In like manner, Barthes proclaims not only the death of the author but also the birth of the reader. For him, “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the author.” One must win the battle of textual control—either the author or the reader. For Barthes, it is clearly the latter, the consequence of which is that any attempt to confidently determine the authorial intention of a text is irrelevant. So he says, “Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.” Intended meaning dies with the author. The shackles of fixed meaning have been loosed, and the reader is now free to determine the meaning of the text, rather than discern it. From this comes the birth of the reader-response hermeneutic.

In a similar vein, Michel Foucault, in his “What Is an Author?” contends that the humanistic cry ad fontes was too optimistic. To say that we can return to the sources (i.e., authors) of texts and determine their meaning is wishful thinking in his view. He illustrates this by referring to the idea of the “complete works” of an author. Foucault raises the question: who gets to decide what an author’s complete works are? Why are some included and others excluded? Why are they arranged certain ways? Is there not an implied interpretive strategy being forced upon the canonization of an author’s works that effectively treats the works of an author with the same literary biases and assumed meanings that formed the canon of Scripture? So Foucault says, “Modernistic criticism, in its desire to recover the original author and text, is

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684 Kuruvilla argues that while this world of the text is unknowable, the world “projected by the writer” is. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 25.
686 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 1326.
687 Ibid., 1325.
688 T.S. Eliot, anticipating the sentiments of postmodernism, captures this well by saying, “What a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting his original meaning—or without forgetting, merely changing.” From *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1933, cited in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1231.
689 E.D. Hirsch may have been one of the earliest to develop of thorough response to this reader-response approach, bridging the gap between general discussions in the area of literature with their overlapping discussions of biblical authority. His argument is based upon the idea of an author’s consciousness, and the important distinction between a valid interpretation, and a certain interpretation. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). See esp. 40, 47, 163.
still effectively Christian in that it attempts to prove the value of a text by locating its author and the author’s intentions.”

It is interesting to note his proposed link between the objective goals of modernism (discerning the facts of history through rational process) and Christianity (discerning the meaning of texts through hermeneutics). For Foucault, both modernism and Christianity are clearly flawed in their hope of getting behind the world of texts in order to determine their actual meaning (let alone authorship). “Authors” don’t exist according to Foucault. In his view, “Authors are just projections of what we think.”

For Foucault, the only author that ultimately still exists is the reader, who searches the empty space left behind by the death of the author (or God). In a somewhat radical conclusion, he states:

> It is not enough, however, to repeat to the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we should reexamine the empty space left by the author’s disappearance.

To “reexamine” is to study, contemplate, and seek; yet it would seem to avoid the idea of imputing fixed, objective meaning. Thus, the reader trumps the author, and the question “What does it mean?” is diminished. Seemingly, the question remaining is, “What does it mean to you?” So Foucault asks, “What difference does it make who’s speaking?”

The implied answer: it does not. The question of who spoke or wrote a text and its fixed meaning is negligible in this literary perspective of secular postmodernism. The conclusion is rather that readers potentially create their own meanings, because the true author and his intentions cannot be identified, and thus the meaning of the text is neither fixed nor static. This is the postmodern turn—the turn to the reader.

Evangelical postmodernism has mused over these issues while trying not to fall off the same cliff as secular postmodernism. As noted above, many of Evangelical postmodernism’s

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690 Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, 110.
691 Paul Ricoeur admits that the idea of hermeneutics is a biblical idea, adopted and adopted by secular, literary tradition. Thus, in his attempt to undo the one, he effectively undoes the other. *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 64.
692 Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 110.
693 *Barthes, Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1479.
694 Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 120.
695 We appreciate Vanhoozer’s caution that “It would be misleading to infer that the reader’s liberation movement endorses interpretive anarchy.” *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 245.
adherents remain unpersuaded by the “foundationalist” expressions of inerrancy and infallibility in conservative communities, often suggesting that such formulations reflect an Enlightenment way of thinking. At the same time, they are unwilling to altogether abandon the idea of biblical authority, opting for something of synthesis of postmodern concepts. Room is left for the author, and just as importantly for the ecclesial and canonical reading of the Christian community. While the “reader-response” hermeneutic is rejected by Evangelical postmoderns, the important place of the reader is preserved, and above that the priority of an ecclesial reading.

By contrast, in more strident, secular postmodern expressions, communities of interpretation may be formed to share ideas, but none of these ideas can be granted authorial status for that would effectively rebuild the interpretive “iron cage” of authorial intent and fixed, static meaning. Thus, for Derrida, “There is no such thing as outside the text,” implying a metaphysics of meaning. According to Derrida, texts, including religious texts, do not serve as windows to the past but more as mirrors of the present. In his view, both reason and religion have “been shaped by a dishonest pursuit of certainty, i.e., the ‘word made flesh’ as a means of linguistic, historical, and moral oppression.” Freedom from this identity cage is the hermeneutical goal and conclusion of secular postmodernism. Each of these intellectual issues shapes the challenging backdrop of preaching in today’s postmodern context—the influence of which is constantly felt upon the church, both inside and out.

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697 John Francke argues that the Triune God is the only true “foundation” of authority, and that this authority is conveyed by the Spirit through Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition. “Scripture, Tradition and Authority: Reconstructing the Evangelical Conception of Sola Scriptura” in Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics, eds. Bacote, Miguelez, Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 205.
699 Gert Kwakkel notes the importance of resisting a privatized reading of Scripture on the basis of 1 Peter 1:10-11, while affirming the importance of recognizing the reader’s role in the interpretation process. “The Reader as Focal Point of Biblical Exegesis” in Correctly Handling the Word of Truth, Eds. Mees te Velde and Gerhard Visscher (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 223.
700 This is the idea to which Vanhoozer is responding in Is there a Meaning in this Text. See Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
701 Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, 76.
703 Appignanesi and Garratt, Introducing Postmodernism, 77.
704 Vuyk, “De zoon met de vader weggooien?,” 116.
6.5 Preaching the Author’s Message

Do authors actually do anything with words, and did God actually say anything with his? Can there be any such thing as an authoritative message that stands on the other side of the biblical text? To the extent that such a thing as a singular intended meaning might have been inspired by God in the biblical author’s mind, how can any reader today, or hearer of a sermon, actually have confidence that the message proclaimed is the intended message from God? In short, can God still speak through the ministry of his word? Questions such as these have in many ways, invigorated postmodern discussions of literature and have surrounded contemporary discussions of biblical criticism. Preaching in this current intellectual climate cannot help but engage these issues. As John Stott has aptly put it, “Nothing undermines preaching more than skepticism about Scripture.”

We would suggest that even though postmodern thought has amplified such questions and their challenging implications, they are not altogether new questions. This epistemological conundrum did not begin with postmodernism, or even modernism, but with the Bible’s first stated question, “Did God actually say…?” (Genesis 3:1). From a biblical point of view, it is from that question that the long shadow of epistemological doubt has attempted to suppress the authority of God’s spoken and written word. The same epistemological question that plagued the historical Adam in the garden also plagued Israel, who needed to be reminded over and over that God had actually spoken, and that his Word once spoken in the past continued to be authoritative and guiding into the present.

Israel’s many episodes of covenant renewal were not simply a retelling of the historical story, but a re-vitalizing of the historical drama. Their feasts were designed around the idea of dramatically re-enacting redemptive history. The covenant sign of circumcision was a

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708 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 223.

709 Fairbairn, Typology of Scripture, 377-380.
reminder that something had been spoken and done in history, and that the promises and obligations that God had once spoken were still just as binding and authoritative as when they were first uttered. The warnings for failing to heed the word of God that were impressed upon Israel were repeated in the New Covenant context, as is seen throughout the New Testament canon, and particularly in the book of Hebrews.\footnote{Michael Kruger, in a manner similar to Vos, argues that this continuation of the Old Testament’s message was one of the ways that New Testament authors and participants viewed canonicity. Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 148-149. A similar point is affirmed by N.T. Wright in The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God—Getting Beyond the Bible Wars (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 53.}

Thus, building on an argument from Psalm 95 about the dangers of not hearing God’s voice \textit{today}, the author of Hebrews compels his audience to understand that the same word of God, once spoken in the past, continues to be “…living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The same word of God, authored by God himself, continues to be effective, and is the objective standard by which God’s judgment will take place (Hebrews 4:13). Such a homiletic posture found in the book of Hebrews, and its emphasis on God’s continued, dramatic speaking, is the stage upon which homiletics must continue to stand, even in this postmodern age of historical and authorial skepticism. The problem remains the same and so does its solution—the historical gospel dramatically revealed in the word of God.

For homiletic purposes, we would reiterate the point that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes), including postmodernism’s recalcitrance toward objective, transcendent truth. It is of peculiar interest that when Jesus stood on trial before Pilate, he claimed to be “\textit{the way, the truth, and the life}.”\footnote{John 14:6, emphasis added. This is defended as the “correspondence view of truth” by Doug Groothuis in “Truth Defined and Defended,” in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, eds. Erickson, Helseth and Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 68-73. See similarly, Richard Phillips, “Can We Know the Truth?,” in The Gospel as Center, 34-36.} It was for this very purpose that he had entered history (John 18:37). Truth, according to Jesus, is historical, incarnational, and redemptive. Though obviously in seed form, the epistemological doubts of secular postmodernism were latent in the minds of some of Jesus’ antagonists. Pilate’s tactically evasive response stands among the most infamous questions of Christian history, “What is truth?” (John 18). Notice that Pilate, in a way that previews the epistemological ambiguities of postmodernism, does not so much rebuke or deny Jesus’ claims, but simply evades them through questioning. The answer to his remarkably
important question stands before him—in Jesus—but Pilate has no desire to wait for or engage Christ’s answer.\(^{712}\) The same intellectual evasiveness pervades much of contemporary postmodern thought—not so much an outright rejection of truth based on historical evidence, but a sophisticated avoidance of authorial truth that is thinly veiled behind a veneer of intellectual skepticism.\(^{713}\)

The difference between the Pharisees and Pilate is suggestively the same as the difference between modernism and postmodernism: the former sought to disprove the claims of Christ on the basis of historical and textual evidence, and the latter seeks not so much to objectively disprove the claims of Christianity, but to circumvent the claims of Christ through skeptical questioning. What Pilate accomplished with one question, strains of postmodernism enhance with an endless subdivision of the same question in malleable forms. Yet the end-goal is the same—freedom from the claim of singular, authoritative truth as embodied in the historical Jesus and proclaimed by the time-tested, biblical gospel. Postmodernism’s claim to epistemological uncertainty is not a new anti-affirmation, but simply the sophisticated and enhanced revision of antiquated reservations about truth, history and authority.

These observations offer the contemporary preacher a point of view from which to interact with the anti-foundational sentiment of postmodernism, and perhaps a sense of confidence that postmodernism is not as new or insurmountable as it may appear.\(^{714}\) Postmodernism—even secular postmodernism—should not be simply portrayed as an epistemology without foundations; its critique of history and authority is just as foundational and presuppositional as those who defend the Bible as historical and authoritative.\(^{715}\) Furthermore, postmodernism’s struggle to embrace the truths of history is not simply an intellectual dilemma created by the confines of history, but is ultimately a question of spiritual and moral submission—a concern which preaching must constantly address.\(^{716}\) From a biblical point of

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\(^{712}\) Van Houwelingen, Johannes: *Het evangelië van het Woord*, 358.

\(^{713}\) Zack Eswine helpfully distinguishes “practical doubt” (dealing with words in the biblical text) and “philosophical doubt” (dealing the question of whether “meaning” actually exists) *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 16.

\(^{714}\) Rico Sneller provocatively likens postmodernism to the mythical Medusa, whose gaze turned many to stone; and yet, ironically, it was her own reflection that proved to be her undoing. “Gebod, belofte, en de tentakels van het schrift,” in *Spiritualiteit en postmodernisme*, ed. Bart Voorsluis (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000), 52-53.


\(^{716}\) Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God Volume 1*, 49.
view, the reason why the secular postmodern skeptic cannot embrace biblical truth, history and authority is not because she simply has not had the right facts objectively portrayed in the right way (the romantic view of rationalism), but because there is a sublime, if not overt unwillingness to submit to the Author of Scripture and his definitions of history, meaning and morality.\(^717\)

Related to these ideas, 1 Corinthians 2:14 states, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” The decision as to whether or not to trust and accept the truth claims of the biblical story, and thus God as its author and completer, is both a spiritual and moral one.\(^718\)

The role of the Holy Spirit cannot be underestimated at this point. The very ideas of biblical inspiration, authority, and even homiletic application are the work of the Holy Spirit. All three of these categories, including faith in the words and work of God, fall lifelessly to the ground apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.\(^719\) From the perspectives of epistemology and preaching, “The Holy Spirit creates hope where otherwise there is no reason for hope.”\(^720\) We should also readily admit that there is a bit of circularity in this argument. At the same time, there must be an honest recognition that all reasoning is somewhat circular. Preaching begins and ends with the work of the Holy Spirit. Logic, reasoning, and argumentation may have their place; but their place is decidedly secondary to the work of the Spirit.\(^721\)

Thus, to the extent that preaching does not bear in mind the intellectual consequences of the fall of Adam and the necessity for the Spirit of God to renew not only the will but also the mind of those who hear sermons, it will regrettably deepen the romantic pitfall of modernism which thought too highly of the natural man’s intellectual abilities.\(^722\) In something of an ironic overlap, secular postmodernism concedes an important biblical conclusion: the natural man cannot cross the bridge of history to understand what really happened nor can he enter the realm

\(^717\) We will engage the moral implications of this material in the next section.

\(^718\) John Frame helpfully suggests that bibliically speaking, the knowledge of God “is obedience” and “produces obedience.” Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013), 705.

\(^719\) This function of the Spirit’s role in the confession of the early church is referred to as the “sine quo non” of the Christian faith.” Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, 170.


\(^722\) Arturo Azurdia refers to this as the “unique work of the Holy Spirit” within the economic actions of the Trinity as it relates to preaching. Spirit Empowered Preaching (Greanies House: Mentor, 2003), 34.
of heaven to see who really wrote the story of human existence. Yet these are the very issues the Bible explicitly addresses by the drama of God entering into history via the gospel. Here we agree with the important observation of Von Balthasar that only a transcendent third party can truly bridge the gap between the past and present, granting authoritative interpretation and meaning to both—and that is God himself. It is in responding to these quandaries that postmodernism and biblical Christianity differ. The former concedes the matter to the dire consequences of intellectual autonomy; the latter submits itself to the necessity and authority of divine revelation. Vanhoozer rightly summarizes these two views as being the contrast between “overstanding” and “understanding.” The former (modern, postmodern, etc.) exalts itself over the biblical text and therefore postures itself de facto in the place of God; the latter finds itself in the humble posture of a creature, created to be a submissive covenant partner with God, yielding to God and his transcendent authority—the foundation of homiletic proclamation.

Preaching is a unique literary-oral phenomenon in that it suggests that the veracity and intention of the text being preached has been “upheld” by its author—God himself through the work of the Spirit. Thus, the author of the biblical text is authoritatively unique and thus the text itself is authoritatively unique. The content of the sermon must, by implication, be unique and authoritative as well. As acknowledged above, this argument is admittedly pre-suppositional, and even somewhat circular, but it is explicitly biblical. For the preacher to proclaim the drama of redemption from this point of view is intellectually honest, helpful, and defensible. The postmodern realization that it is impossible to break out of the hermeneutical spiral, or to be free from pre-suppositions, may actually create a fertile environment for the reconsideration of the biblical story as a coherent metanarrative that makes sense out of the world in which we live as the marred yet redeemable Imago Dei. Ultimately, not only are we unable to write the story of our lives, the only real confidence we have in accurately interpreting ourselves and the world in

725 This remarkably helpful section both concludes the book, as well as captures, in our view, the essence of literary humility as it relates to biblical literature. Vanhoozer, Is There A Meaning in this Text, 462-467. This overstanding which leads to skepticism is well-embodied by Bart Ehrman, who suggests, “There is only one way to know whether stories about Jesus were ever made up or modified. That’s by looking at all the stories, comparing them with one another, and deciding for yourself.” A Brief Introduction to the New Testament, 130. With this method, how could one ever arrive at a confident conclusion?
which we live is found in submitting to the one who is capable of writing (and righting) it for us—the divine author who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

It is in this context that we find the contributions of the RH and DR paradigms to be helpful for the purpose of preaching in a postmodern era. The RH emphasis demands careful attention to the narrative of Scripture in its historical setting and context, while appreciating the over-all continuity of the redemptive story as it progressively unfolds. A Christ-centered preaching of the gospel from all of Scripture displays not simply the message of redemption (which alone has the power to work faith in its hearers); it also makes a secondary argument for the implicit harmony and authority of Scripture itself. It resists the temptation of succumbing to anthropocentric moralism. Wedded to this RH emphasis, particulars of the DR paradigm draw the postmodern hearer into the drama of Scripture, rather than letting her remain at a safe distance as a spectator to the text. She is drawn not simply into the process of interpretation, but also the important aspect of faithful participation. As preaching calls its hearers to subject their own disharmonized narratives to that of the biblical drama, the potential for replacing a posture of overstanding with one of understanding the text is optimistically possible. Again, apart from the vitalizing work of the Spirit, none of these hermeneutic or rhetorical efforts will bear any fruit. Thus, the real hope of the preacher is embedded in the promise of Scripture itself: that insofar as preaching Christ’s word abides in him, it will bear much fruit (John 15:3-5).

6.6 Postmodernism and the Challenge of Morality

We have saved this section for last, as in many ways it is the logical conclusion to secular postmodernism’s skepticism regarding the certainty of history and the extent to which the authorial intention of texts—especially biblical texts—can be confidently known. The implications are significant for discussions regarding morality—an issue biblical preaching must constantly address. In light of the postmodern conundrums of history and authorship asserted above, who has the right to say that their moral interpretations of history and meaning are correct, normative, and especially authoritative? Jacques Derrida, the founding father of deconstructionism and one of the chief architects of postmodernism, has observed that the authorial-intention approach to interpreting history and historical works has forged an iron cage

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726 This point is readily conceded by many postmoderns, and is referred to as “self positioning.” See Woefel, The Varieties of Aesthetic Experience, 292.
of morality in which many unwilling subjects have been forced to live. This “iron cage” could be illustrated through an endless list of moral issues currently in vogue, many of which are now vigorously discussed and contested.

We would be careful at this point to distance postmodernism from its oft-earned reputation of relativism. As noted in chapter 3, not even secular postmodernism is arguing for total moral relativism, as such a view would die the death of too many qualifications. In other words, if all morality is relative—and thus equally acceptable—by what ethical standard would postmodern thinkers condemn the inhuman atrocities committed during World War II? In fact, postmodern thinkers have been careful to distance themselves from total relativism, arguing for something more along the lines of a contextual pragmatism based upon voluntary alliance. This is an important nuance as we make the turn to the way in which the homiletic model advocated thus far seeks to address the concerns raised by the postmodern skeptic. With that qualification noted, it is still true that there are ways in which secular postmodernism takes on a quasi-missional disposition, striving not so much for the ending of religion but for the blending of religion. Secular postmodernism’s indifference toward objective, transcendent truth has created a climate in which the absence of tolerance is intolerable. Thus, a strange new world of religious uniformity in which all truth claims are perceived as equally true is the pluralistic identity of postmodernity and the challenge before contemporary preaching.

Thus, there is an ironic air of intolerance in certain expressions of postmodernism, casting a vision in which the new metanarrative discards older ones in place of pluralistic religious consumerism. Robert Sellers describes this well when he defines the postmodern impulse as, “To seek ‘spirituality’ without necessarily practicing any one particular religion, or

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728 Our goal here is not to raise or attempt to settle these particular moral issues raised by postmodern thought, but rather to underscore the reality that postmodernism, despite its claims, is effectively a world-view with moral implications. In short, everyone is living out the consequences of what he or she believes.

729 Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), cited in Wells, Above All Earthly Powers, 81-82.


731 Stefan Paas, De werkers van het laatste uur: De inwijing van nieuwkomers in het christelijk geloof en in de christelijke gemeente (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), 273.

sometimes by blending several religions into one new constellation of beliefs and rituals.”

This subliminally missional agenda within certain postmodern expressions of morality and (in)tolerance proves the point that it is impossible to live without some form of moral compass and societal metanarrative—one with missional implications. The postmodern rejection of biblical tradition and modernism has only created a bronze cage in place of the iron one it set out to destroy. There is no such thing as life apart from a metanarrative. *Everyone is a part of some story*—something which is true of those inside and outside the church. Yet what does this imply for the moral aspect of preaching in a postmodern context?

6.7 Preaching the Meaning of Texts and the Meaning of Life

In many respects, this section draws together the application of the dissertation as a whole, as it binds together many ideas previously stated in the context of addressing the postmodern moral conundrum from a homiletic perspective informed by RH and DR insights. The moral implications of the loss of confidence in history and thus any metanarrative (whether secular or biblical), as well as the so-called “death of the author” (whether secular or biblical) has led to the inescapable collapse of moral objectivity. This is, in many respects, the logical consequence of the previously addressed ideas. Without the “center” of metanarrative and meta-authorship, postmodern morality is often subjectively defined, except that which might be defined by varying “tribal” communities. It is for this reason that we suggest that homiletic interaction with postmodernism should include not only an honest acknowledgment of the preacher’s own presuppositions, but also a constant engagement of postmodern presuppositions. Can the postmodern skeptic truly make sense of a world without God? Is there any such thing as a story without an author? As Altena asks, can postmodernism find authentic meaning in life when God is “no factor in our life-story?”

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time-tested confession of Augustine, “You have formed us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”738

To a certain extent, no one actually can, nor indeed does, live consistently with postmodernism’s ideals—a truth which many postmodern skeptics need to be challenged to consider. What secular postmodernism is, in reality, is an intellectually sophisticated attempt to rewrite the script of individual and social morality, without objective grounds for doing so, allowing the demise of empirical optimism to give way to the tyranny of epistemological skepticism. While, as noted above, there are many helpful features in postmodern thought, its skeptical core can often lead to cynicism for those who do not learn to discerningly separate the wheat from the chaff. Preaching that is sensitive to the questions of postmodernism stands poised to offer a message of hope to those who may have lost confidence in history, authority, and morality. Thus, proclaiming the redemptive drama of God in the gospel and its moral implications (application) is of vital importance in a postmodern context. Preaching from this perspective challenges the skeptic that the only way to make any sense of their life-story is by seeing it in the context of a larger story—the biblical one—and it reminds those inside the covenant community of their place in the biblical drama, just as each witness in Hebrews 11 uniquely played their part in the hall of faith.739 It is for this reason that the pulpit, called to inform the moral conscience of the nations, has become the object of postmodern indifference, and in some environments, its scorn.740

Our proposal is that the sermon should not only display the drama of God’s redemption in Christ, but also direct hearers in how best to perform the particular script of Scripture in faithfully improvised ways, thus displaying the truth of the gospel.741 Not only is the biblical

739 Alasdair MacIntyre interestingly notes the way in which stories form the script of meaning and morality, and that apart from confidence in those stories, our lives become dramatic chaos, and the answer to the question “What am I to do?” becomes unanswerable. After Virtue (Norte Dame: University of Norte Dame Press, 1984), 216-217.
740 Harry Blamires, The Post-Christian Mind (Vancouver: Regent College Press, 2001), 163. We might suggest that this helps to explain why church attendance in countries where postmodernism’s influence is strongly felt has waned in contrast to previous decades. The pulpit is the emblem of everything secular postmodernism decries—history, authority, and morality.
story unified, but it is also the only story which makes sense of the world in which we live, both individually and corporately. As Vanhoozer summarily concludes, “The biblical drama is the only drama.” Postmodern thinkers today, inside and outside the church, yearn to be a part of a meaningful, relational story. From this point of view, the biblical skeptic as well as the confident Christian living in a postmodern and “post-Christian” age alike might be compelled to properly live out their part in the drama of history, and to do so in the context of covenant community—the church. Thus, the homiletic imperative is not, “This is the story; now believe it,” but “this is the story; now live it.”

The Bible does not simply reveal a story to be told, but a drama to be actively participated in and lived out, and this is most helpfully lived out in the context of the church. As Gert Kwakkel has noted, “people do not enjoy total freedom in assigning meaning to texts.” By contrast, they are called not only to a submissive reading of the biblical text in a posture of understanding rather than overstanding, they are particularly called into what the Bible designs as the primary community of biblical interpretation—the church. Again, Kwakkel helpfully states, “The church of Jesus Christ is still the most proper place for the Bible to be read.” This idea is suggested in Hebrews, where abandoning the community of the saints is inseparably linked to misreading and thus mis-living the biblical story. Those who misread and abandoned the gospel were described as having spurned and rejected the promises in contrast to those who inherited them by faith and a right understanding of the gospel. Thus, in a very meaningful sense, everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, is already in the biblical drama; the only question is whether her role is one of submission (ie., like Jacob) to the Author of life who is at the same time the script-writer of history, or if she is living out a subversive role of rebellion,

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742 Graeme Goldsworthy helpfully points out that this canonical unity is a “theological presupposition, not an empirically based construct.” Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics, 251. See also Kruger, Canon Revisited, 148.
743 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 82.
744 That even secular postmoderns have this yearning has been affirmed by Baudrillard, in Simulacra and Simulation, 43.
747 Ibid., 219.
pointlessly abandoning the scripts that she was created to perform in favor of idolatrous scripts of her own design (ie., like Esau).\textsuperscript{748}

The historically informed and exegetically derived indicatives and imperatives of Scripture are bound to one another. Thus to divorce one from the other is to tear apart what God has joined together, and succumb to the foundation-less piety of modern liberalism.\textsuperscript{749} To reverse the order is potentially just as dangerous as it effectively inverts the order and priority of the biblical drama.\textsuperscript{750} Thus, the search for meaningful morality is attainable because the author-God of Scripture is also the transcendent God of history. Everything between creation and consummation is part of the story, part of the drama of God in history, and is governed by the inspired script. In Young’s words:

> Like music, the word of God is never just ‘back there,’ tied to an antiquated score in an unread library, experienced as alien, as discerned across a great gulf or hermeneutical gap: it is ‘realized’ in performance, a performance inevitably inadequate at present, yet an earnest of the great eschatological performance to come in God’s good time.\textsuperscript{751}

To pretend to not be part of the drama is to effectively deny one’s very existence.\textsuperscript{752} The Bible’s message of truth is not an enslaving one, but a liberating one—as sermons must constantly proclaim. And the church, rather than a social prison, is a “theatre of love, reconciliation, and hope.”\textsuperscript{753} Believing that there is no absolute truth is not liberating, but rather a new form of slavery to a different master—skepticism. It is for this reason that Jesus said that knowing the truth would make one free (John 8:32). Knowing the truth of our stories is not only existentially honest, it also grants meaning and morality to our lives. This is what the biblical drama proclaims, and what the pulpit should proclaim week after week—not moralistic threats abstracted from the gospel but the saving and sanctifying work of Jesus.\textsuperscript{754} The absence of this dramatic emphasis explains the negative reaction of Christians that have been influenced by postmodernism, and postmodern skeptics alike. Proclaiming the drama of redemption offers

\textsuperscript{748} Horton, Christless Christianity, 240.
\textsuperscript{749} As Machen stated, “Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative…Liberalism makes Christ an example for faith; Christianity, the object of faith.” Christianity and Liberalism, 47.
\textsuperscript{751} Young, The Art of Performance, 182.
\textsuperscript{752} Horton notes the irony of postmodernism’s willful abandonment of hope, making it the incarnation of the Beatles “Nowhere Man.” Covenant and Eschatology, 275.
\textsuperscript{753} Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, 427.
\textsuperscript{754} Horton, Christless Christianity, 224.
comfort and hope in that the meaning of life is found in the Author of life. It is he who has imprinted upon the human soul a deep impression that life only makes sense as we come to know the author of our script and his purpose for our lives.\textsuperscript{755} Thus, the homiletic call is to draw the listener into the drama of redemptive history and to show her the way in which God has accomplished the grandest rescue mission of history in the gospel, and how she can now become a beautiful part of that drama as well.\textsuperscript{756} Thus, the pastoral goal is never to leave the hearer of this message in a passive posture, but to show her what an actively fitting response to the Missio Dei should be.\textsuperscript{757}

It is in this missional context that we reiterate the weakness in the development of the RH paradigm, and at the same time find an enhancement in the DR paradigm. The former, as we have noted in the historical survey, failed to produce a genuinely outward-facing, missional identity.\textsuperscript{758} During the earlier stages of the RH developments, the posture of many of its advocates was understandably reactionary and protective of the church. In a sense, the mission came to the church. Critics of the RH paradigm should again remember that the movement developed in the context not only of apologetic battles with higher criticism, but also of the bitter realities of a World War and entrenched ecclesiastical struggles.\textsuperscript{759} Still, as C. Trimp pled in the 1980’s, there was a need to continue the discussions about preaching with new conversation partners and in new contexts. We are suggesting that this continuing of the conversation implies a focus not merely on inter-ecclesiastical homiletic questions, but on extra-ecclesiastical missional questions as well. In other words, the Bible’s drama of redemption is not simply the drama of the church, but the dramatic interaction between God, the church, and the world. This is clearly embodied in the “witnessing” of the saints in Hebrews 11, who saw themselves as not only inheriting the promises of the gospel by faith, but also as commissioned to proclaim the

\textsuperscript{755} David Henderson, \textit{Culture Shift: Communicating God’s Truth to our Changing World} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 147.
\textsuperscript{756} Christopher Wright summarizes the message and mission of the Bible well by saying, “The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God.” \textit{The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 2006, 48. This point is simple enough for children to understand. See Sally Lloyd-Jones \textit{The Jesus Storybook Bible} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 17.
\textsuperscript{757} Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrine}, 21-22; see also 252-263 for fuller treatment.
\textsuperscript{758} Attempts to rectify this in recent times are noteworthy. Kees Haak, coming from an RH background, suggests ways in which missions amongst postmodernists may be advanced, particularly by emphasizing the importance of community. “Schaamte en schuld op Papua: De schaamtculuur als opmaat voor missionaire benadering in een postmoderne context,” in \textit{Instemmend luisteren: Studies voor Kees de Ruiter}, eds. Beute and Van de Kamp (Kampen: Kok, 2014), 136-159, esp. 156.
\textsuperscript{759} See chapter one above.
The gospel implies mission, or, as Vanhoozer puts it, “The gospel is a missional statement—a statement of the divine mission of Son and Spirit.”

The gospel is what Christians need to hear week after week for the sake of their sanctification and comfort, but it is also what non-Christians (including secular postmodern thinkers) need to hear in order to be reconciled with God and to find cognitive and existential rest from their skepticism. Their part in the drama is an otherwise frustrated and hopeless role, and is in desperate need of redemption. The church’s continued role in the unfolding of the dramatic Missio Dei is to be God’s covenant partner and servant, bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth until the kingdom of God is consummated in all of its climactic glory. The moral implications of the idea of walking with God while participating in the drama of redemption ought to be at the heart of preaching in a postmodern era, and is an important contribution of the DR paradigm. Thus, we find it deficient to the extent that expressions of the RH preaching paradigm not only lacked application or explicit imperatives, but also lacked a particularly missional emphasis. But deficient does not mean unhelpful or unredeemable. Rather, we believe that by taking some of its best fruit and combining it with that of the DR paradigm, a homiletic model with a Christ-centered focus and an outward facing, missional imperative is attainable. This proposal has the potential of helping to respond to postmodernism’s dilemmas, just as the early RH advocates responded to the crises created by higher criticism. The issues today are different than those of the last century, and yet the overlap is also striking and reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun. The church is still on stage, living out a witness role in history, proclaiming a message of truth that has yet to meet a genuinely new challenge.

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761 Thus, the time-tested and warm summary of protestant theology as found in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. Fred Kloester calls it the “song of the Reformation.” *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 1998), 23.
763 An interesting contrast can be made between a pilgrim and a nomad. The former is passing through yet has a destination; the latter is wondering aimlessly without one. This homelessness of postmodernism is in stark contrast to the idea of eschatology—the goal of Christian pilgrimage, and the communal identity of the local church. See Lee Beach, “The Local Church: Postmodern Possibilities,” in *The Church, Then and Now* eds. Stanly Porter and Cynthia Westfall (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 136.
765 S. Paas, writing within this Dutch Reformed tradition, argues that one of the greatest needs of preaching today is the reconsideration of the pulpit as a means of evangelistic mission to the unreached, not simply the building up of the saints. ‘Missionair preken’, in: *Postille 2010-2011* (Boekencentrum: Zoetermeer, 2010) 16-22, esp. 22.
church may refine and reform its thinking and homiletic rhetoric, but the message must remain the same. Sermons, of necessity, constantly maintain some form of rhetoric. They are obliged to employ the most effective form of rhetoric. This is the burden of the pulpit: to continue to proclaim an old message in new ways; to creatively yet faithfully tell the same story that began in an earthly garden and ends in a heavenly temple.

This is effectively what we saw in Hebrews 11. God, who first spoke and acted, continues to speak and act through his word and Spirit to and through his church. God not only revealed the gospel by speaking in history, he embodied it by entering into history in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the word made flesh. His life was one of faithfully performing the word of God in various contexts, thus creatively improvising the biblical script from one setting to another without ever compromising its morality. Facets of his person and work were revealed in the great hall of faith in Hebrews 11. A similar assembly of the faithful exists in the church today which is called to perform the biblical script in this postmodern scene—faithfully improvising, yet never compromising in its application of Scripture to all of life.

God not only walked with his people, he actively conformed them to his image through the drama of their lives, making them fittingly dressed actors on the stage of history for his glory. In this sense, the church today, influenced by the best and the worst of postmodernism, continues to creatively embody the gospel according to authoritative script, speaking and acting as the Imago Dei. As Richard Hays says, “Right reading of the New Testament occurs only where the Word is embodied.” The pulpit exists to speak with nothing less than the authority of God to these very issues. This includes hermeneutically informed, Christ-centered moral instruction

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766 Thus, C.S. Lewis implores, “Our business is to present that which is timeless (the same yesterday, today and tomorrow) in the particular language of our own time.” God in the Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014 reprint), 91.
769 Keller rightly observes that the question of whether preachers must “change for the culture or challenge it?” will ever be before the church.” Preaching, 96. He subsequently offers numerous suggestions on how to do so and suggests, “No one can present a culture-free formulation of biblical truth.” Ibid., 92. Being sensitive to the culture without being seduced by it is the tightrope upon which every preacher stands.
771 Ibid., 305, emphasis added.
that leads to a proper reading and embodying of the word of God.  

Preaching calls the postmodern skeptic out of moral darkness and into the light of Christ.  

It also directs the church, living in a postmodern age in how to perform her missionary calling while walking with God en route to the heavenly city. The fact that God is “still speaking” (Hebrews 4:10) to us today, particularly through the ministry of his preached word, is the foundation of our confidence, confession, and commission—as well as our morality.

6.8 Summary, Cautions, and Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to state and address three important issues within postmodern thinking—the questions of history, authorship, and morality—from a homiletic perspective that synthesizes the DNA of the RH and DR paradigms. Though our treatment of many issues has been brief, we yet hope it may suggest ways in which the challenges articulated by strains of postmodern thought might be given a homiletic response. We have not suggested an overly specific homiletic model, per se, but rather have suggested particular nuances that ought to be considered in the current context of preaching, and the widespread influence of postmodernism. In particular, it has been suggested that viewing the Bible as revealing a redemptive drama is an enhancement over the idea of simply viewing it as a one-dimensional epic. Adding the dramatic emphasis causes us to see history under the light of the biblical story and that God himself did not simply inspire a book but entered into a drama in history. The Bible, however, does not record the end of the drama, but rather forecasts how it will end. In the meantime (post-biblical history), the drama is still unfolding as the church continues to perform its role of proclaiming and enacting the gospel before a watching world.

In living out the gospel, the church joins the cast of characters from Abel and the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11, to the martyrs in Revelation, who all proclaimed the same redemptive

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772 "The notion of reading and embodying Scripture in the community of faith means that we are participants in a company that includes all people who have sought to read and embody Scripture faithfully through the ages—for us as Christians, the church of Jesus Christ.” L. Gregory Jones, “Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith” in The Art of Reading Scripture eds. Ellen Davis and Richard Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 147.

773 This is what D.A. Carson refers to as “worldview evangelism.” See his “Athens Revisited,” in Telling the Truth, ed Carson, esp. 386.


775 “We who stand in historical continuity with the early church have also been taken up into its mission. Their story is also ours.” Bartholomew & Goheen, Drama of Scripture, 172, emphasis original. See also Nichols, Welcome to the Story, 132.
message across the pages of history and various, dramatic scenes of redemption. The church today continues the drama of redemption in the context of preaching and living before a postmodern audience. Preaching with these thoughts in mind presses the claims of Christ not only upon the postmodern skeptic but also upon the church living in a postmodern context, sifting through its varying nuances. Arguably, no sermon is complete until God’s part has been made clear (the accomplishment of the gospel), and the church has been told how to faithfully perform her script in the “theater of God’s glory,” and the unbelieving postmodern skeptic has been called to abandon her tattered script in order to take up the biblical script and follow Jesus. Reflections on both the RH and DR paradigms should enhance homiletic commitment to these ideas. The common DNA of the two is not only notable, but can also be helpfully synthesized for homiletic purposes in a postmodern context.

A few cautions are in order as we conclude this chapter. The first is to reassert the difficulty of describing postmodernism as a singular coherent idea. Additionally, in the eyes of some, we are no longer living in a postmodern age, but a post-postmodern age. A number of suggestions have been made as to exactly what philosophical term would best express the intellectual climate that follows postmodernism, but none seem to have really stuck thus far. In other words, there is nothing even close to a consensus as to what age follows postmodernism, or whether or not we have even truly exited postmodernism into the next intellectual climate. In each age of the church’s history, she has had to rise up to meet certain challenges and the various rhetorical forms by which those challenges were expressed; from first-century polytheism to militant Islam, from the Enlightenment to atheism, from modernism to secular postmodernism. The pulpit does not speak into a vacuum, but into the historical context that shapes its pastoral address. While the gospel-cure remains the same from age to age, the complexities of sin, both moral and intellectual, continue to form a moving target, to which the pulpit must be ever-sensitive. Today it is postmodernism; tomorrow it will be _____________.

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776 John Calvin, Institutes 1.6.2.
778 Long notes that any definition of postmodern is itself technically “a modern definition of postmodernism, because postmodernists would say that postmodernism can’t be defined.” Telling the Truth, ed. Carson, 325.
779 Jesse Lopez and Garry Potter argue for “critical realism” as the next movement to follow postmodernity, describing postmodernism consistently in the past tense, not so much because it is a thing of the past, but because the epistemological uncertainty of postmodernism, in their view, must lead to a more realistic epistemology—hence, their proposal of “critical realism.” After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism (New York: The Althone Press, 2001), 4.
Having affirmed the constantly changing environment in which the pulpit ministry is performed, we would also like to reiterate that the homiletic proposal in this chapter hopes to address some of the genuine challenges of postmodernism in a meaningful way but without demonizing it in every way. The faces of postmodernism are many and its expressions sophisticated, from stridently secular to selectively evangelical. Our focus has been largely on the former. Homiletic reflection needs to bear these varied nuances in mind as it seeks to know and address the nuances of its context. To the extent that postmodernism itself is a fairly elastic movement, so also should our rhetorical responses to it reflect some sort of pastorally discerning flexibility. In this light, we are suggesting that a sermon should bear in mind the way the same gospel reaches different people in different situations. On this point of improvisation, Stefan Pas notes, “In each new context the church must give a new answer, not primarily in regard to the changing social situation, but in regard to its universal calling to be a witness of the gospel.”

The homiletic imperative is to be always improvising yet never compromising. Thus, part of what we have found particularly helpful about the DR paradigm is the rhetorical way in which it calls the church to creatively embody the imperatives of the Great Commission. It is hoped that this might compel church members to see themselves as the ‘living application’ of the sermon, embodying in specific ways what the sermon proclaims. While whole-heartedly affirming that the ordinary means by which God will work in the hearts of people to save them is through the preaching of his word from pulpits,\textsuperscript{781} at the same time, we would not deny the way in which ordinary Christians, living out their lives in the context of their postmodern associations, will have creative opportunities to be salt and light before a watching, listening world.

Thus, not only should the sermon speak directly to the heart of postmodern issues (this is still the intellectual landscape of the day), but it should also equip Christians living in a postmodern age to figure out their part in embodying the redemptive drama of God in his Missio Dei. The church is thus enabled, through preaching, to embody “the drama of discipleship” as Vanhoozer puts it, effectively making the local church a “living Bible” which is formed by


\textsuperscript{781} Westminster Shorter Catechism 88.
God’s Spirit, directed by Scripture, and missionally focused. Preaching, from this point of view, “Reminds disciples who they are, from where they have come, and why they are here.” We would add that this is not only what disciples of the church need to hear, but is also the vacuum created by secular postmodernism into which sermons must constantly proclaim their message of hope.

Lastly, we wish to underscore that in our view preaching is as much an art as it is a science. It tells the same “what” of the biblical story, while employing various rhetorical styles to communicate that message. There is a not a singular homiletic (rhetorical) method in the Bible. Rather, there is a singular message in the Bible (the gospel of God’s dramatic redemption in Christ), and that message is preached by a diverse array of God’s servants. That message is preached to God’s people as well as those outside the covenant community (ecclesiastical preaching as well as evangelistic preaching) and is preached in a variety of ways. The New Testament itself embodies a number of different homiletic styles and structures from the Sermon on the Mount, to Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost, to the longest known sermon in the Bible—the book of Hebrews. Each of these is obviously nuanced in their rhetorical structure and pastoral context, as we saw particularly in our treatment of Hebrews 11. We note that each of the New Testament’s sermons was proclaimed in effectively the same age; yet stylistic nuances abound between them.

It is for these reasons that we have been careful not to attempt to present an iron-clad model for preaching in a postmodern age, but rather have suggested a model of preaching that creatively yet faithfully proclaims the biblical gospel as God has revealed it in his word, yet in ways that are sensitive to the issues created by our postmodern context. We believe that nuances of RH and DR paradigms will serve as helpful tools on the tool belt of preachers, enabling them to perform their homiletic task with greater ability in the particular contexts in

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782 This is the theme of Kevin Vanhoozer’s new book, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Redemption* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 1.
783 Ibid., 131.
785 We agree with Jeffrey Arthurs that, “There Is No Such Thing as the Sermon Form.” *Preaching with Variety*, 16, emphasis added.
786 On Acts, see Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 268; on Hebrews, see Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 62.
which they find themselves. Thus, the *science* of homiletics is the exegesis of the text and of the people who hear sermons; the *art* of homiletics is crafting the sermon in the most rhetorically effective manner for the particular sake of those who hear it.\(^{788}\) Proclaiming the redemptive-historical drama with a listening ear and a creative tongue may prove to be helpful and effective in the contemporary postmodern scene in which we find ourselves planting and pastoring churches. As Horton puts it, “In as much as the redemptive-historical model works more like a drama…wherever the word is correctly preached and sacraments are correctly administered, there is no doubt a true church there.”\(^{789}\) Rhetoric and ritual are bound to one another in common service to the preached word. A common unity is found in the gospel that is preached; diversity is found in the rhetorical tools used to proclaim the redemptive-historical drama of redemption, along with the spirited role that each hearer of the sermon is called to perform in fitting response. Amid the changing scenes of postmodernism, one clear and climactic goal must be at the center of every sermon: all eyes on Jesus—the author and perfecter of the drama of preaching.

\(^{788}\) Park, *Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit*, 381.

\(^{789}\) Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 243.
Summary and Overall Conclusion

*What could be more full of meaning?—for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is that the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.*

The pulpit leads the world. But how? Like a ship upon the sea, waves of doubt and darkness constantly beat against it and the way forward is not always easily discerned. The temptation to turn and be driven by the various winds of doctrine is ever-present. Yet Scripture calls those who preach to bear straight into the heart of the storm, mastering it, and trusting that from the pulpit, God will lead his people to the safe harbor which he alone can secure. Our proposal in this dissertation has been that a homiletic model that synthesizes the common DNA of the RH and DR paradigms may have the unique ability to embody certain hermeneutical and homiletic commitments of Scripture, as well as be an effective rhetorical strategy for preaching in our postmodern context. Thus, chapter one introduced the main ideas of the dissertation, as well as offered a brief explanation of the purpose, necessity, and plan of the project.

Chapter two attempted to bridge the gap between the original discussion surrounding the RH preaching debates in the Netherlands and its contemporary expressions today, both inside and outside the Netherlands. It was noted that the older preaching debate focused largely on the question of preaching Christ from the Old Testament narratives, as well as the issue of proper homiletic application in preaching. In this context, the terms “redemptive-historical preaching” and “exemplaristic preaching” emerged. Both terms were and are easily subject to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Regrettably, many caricatures and uncharitable portrayals of the debate abound, even among contemporary homiletic thought. Thus, the need for nuanced representation remains.

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The RH view, at its best, sought to protect the idea that the Bible is foremost about God and his plan to accomplish redemption in history, and that to reduce sermons to moralistic, anthropocentric abstractions was not consistent with the purpose of special revelation, and effectively upstaged God from the drama of redemption. On the other side of the debate were those (labeled “exemplaristic” by RH advocates) who believed that Scripture required not only homiletic application, but often embodied this homiletic application in exemplaristic ways. Each side, in our view, was capable of making strong arguments with biblical support, and had pastoral motives behind them. Each side also had a general recognition of Christ as the tie that binds together all of Scripture. Regrettably, the two sides were unable to reach a mature, harmonious conclusion on issues of homiletic application—a state of affairs that remains to this day. This is likely due the fact that the original debate was not narrowly over homiletics, but occurred in the context of a World War, higher critical attacks on the historicity and authority of Scripture, and the fracturing of a denomination over issues of covenant theology, ecclesiology, and polity.

Numerous decades later, on several different continents, echoes of the debate are still heard. Recent interest in Dutch Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos and Abraham Kuyper have helped to rekindle interest in the RH hermeneutic and homiletic, though driven by various concerns. The rise of postmodernity, in particular, has caused many to consider narrative approaches to history capable of defending historically confessional views of Scripture and morality, while being culturally relevant at the same time. All these ideas, in one way or another, have led to the revitalization, if not popularization of certain RH concerns.

In chapter three we introduced the drama of redemption (DR) paradigm, and juxtaposed it to the RH paradigm, noting overlapping concerns within each. Key among the two is the priority of God as the main speaker and actor in Scripture, as well as the idea that the Bible is bound together by a covenantal metanarrative that lends itself to a homiletically useful apologetic for the authority of Scripture, as well as a Christ-centered hermeneutic that harmonizes the message of the Old and New Testaments. At the same time, it was noted that the distinctions between the RH and DR models are just as important as their similarities. In particular, the DR paradigm, in our view, has been able to advance beyond the regrettable
loggerhead at which the RH preaching debate remained entrenched—particularly as it relates to the important role of the hearer in preaching.

It is here that we find the DR paradigm remarkably helpful, as it *insists* that a faithful treatment of Scripture (i.e., preaching) include the way in which Scripture directs the hearer to understand how she is called to faithfully and fittingly respond to the ministry of the word. Numerous authors were employed to demonstrate the way in which the drama metaphor is a helpful way of thinking about Scripture, covenant, and homiletic application. The idea of *improvising the script* was also discussed as a provocative way of seeing scriptural drama as that which must be creatively performed in various scenes without departing from the script itself. Thus, the either/or dichotomy of Christ-centered versus application-driven preaching is overcome by the nuances of the DR paradigm, which both overlaps as well as surpasses, the RH preaching debate.

In chapter four we looked at Hebrews 11 as an exegetical case study of our proposal. In particular, the question we sought to explore was to what extent does the overall narrative of Hebrews 11 reflect a redemptive drama in which each of the saints “by faith” reveals a facet of the person and work of Christ—the denouement of redemptive history? In other words, how do their individual scenes function as revelation within the drama of redemption that witness to the better things to come in Christ? Our conclusion was that God had shaped the lives of each of the saints in Hebrews 11 in such a way that they were not only looking to the fulfillment of the redemptive promises in the future, but that God was also displaying aspects of *how* those promises were to be later fulfilled in Christ. Thus, the “cloud of witnesses” of Hebrews 11 both *look to* and *reveal* the things to come in Christ by faith.

Their part in God’s drama of redemption was not simply to embrace the promises of the covenant, but also to reveal them. Proof that this is the case is found in the ascription given to Jesus at the beginning of Hebrews 12, where he is referred to as the “author and perfecter of faith.” Jesus perfects, or eschatologizes, the revelation given through each of the saintly witnesses of Hebrews 11, as he is the one after whose image they are patterned. This is consistent with the *better word* hermeneutic of Hebrews 1:1-3, and seems to fit in with the overarching hermeneutic of the book of Hebrews, where nearly everything the author of the book touches in the Old Testament is turned into a facet of God’s revelation of the person and work of
Christ. Related to this, we noted with interest that the author of Hebrews pastorally describes the suffering of the church, past and present, as a theater of martyrdom. Thus, the saints of Hebrews 11 performed their supportive roles as scripted by God; yet Jesus was the perfecter of their dramatic previews. This leads to considering how the church today continues to perform its role within the theater of God’s glory, and ways in which the sermon instructs the church in how to faithfully improvise the Scripture (application).

Chapter five sought to address this important question of homiletic application. While not wishing to abandon the traditional approach, we have suggested that it needs to be further developed, enriched, and enhanced. The traditional expository preaching paradigm has proven to be both useful and yet quite improvable. Several observations are worth summarizing. First, in our view, a rigid distinction between exposition and application is not consistently demonstrable from Scripture, nor is it, in our opinion, equally edifying. We agree with the many who have noted that the entire sermon is to be preached with an eye to application, and that application should always be anchored in faithful exposition. Secondly, we suggested that as the gospel is the tie that binds all of Scripture together, it must also be the glue that holds in place the entire sermon—especially the application of a sermon. The gospel implies Christian obedience, and to overly divorce the indicative from the imperative in preaching is to tear apart what God has joined together.

In this same chapter, we also proposed the idea of imitation as a potential improvement of the application idea. We favored the imitation paradigm as it seems to be built upon a clearer biblical vocabulary and is less fraught with some of the baggage of the modern critics who dismissed the history of Scripture in favor of subjective application, a trend that leads to a difficulty in distinguishing much contemporary evangelical preaching from its liberal counterparts. In other words, evangelical preaching that fails to anchor its application in redemption and history sounds dangerously similar to the anti-historical impulses of the modernism and postmodernism to which it often seeks to respond. Union with Christ, the foundation of our relationship with God, implies growing into the image of Christ as his adopted sons and daughters. Preaching is the primary means by which God instructs his church how to embody the drama of redemption into which we have been called. While creatively improvising our Christian obedience in the varying scenes of life is unavoidable, faithfulness to the script of
Scripture is non-negotiable, and no sermon is complete until this homiletic requirement is fulfilled.

The last chapter of this dissertation attempted to synthesize the fruit of the previous chapters with a particular eye to preaching in a postmodern context. We recognized the difficulty of defining postmodernism—a movement that self-consciously resists definition, yet at the same time, we believe that it remains possible to identify certain trends within the movement. Particular expressions of postmodernism have displayed a deep skepticism regarding the issues of history, authority, and morality, the effects of which have certainly been felt within the church. We surveyed the landscape of these developments in a way that, while admittedly brief, was still hopefully able to give a postmodern backdrop against which our homiletic proposal may be set. It is worth highlighting that our focus was primarily upon secular postmodernism, and not the various types of Evangelical postmoderns and its mediating nuances.

Postmodernism is the inescapable context in which pastoral ministry currently happens. The church is both affected by it and responding to it, as it sets the stage for the church’s carrying out of the Great Commission. Postmodernism is also not all bad; in fact, in many ways it has ironically created a narrative lens through which Bible believers and skeptics may read and discuss Scripture. It has also highlighted the importance of the place of readers of texts, and by implication, hearers of sermons. Postmodernism has also offered devastating critiques of the failures of Enlightenment and modernism, and created a revival of interest in the biblical drama, at least in certain circles. Even more helpful is the way in which postmodernism has exposed the reality that there is no such thing as ‘presupposition-less’ hermeneutics. Every theologian, preacher, congregant and critic reads the Bible through tinted lenses, and is informed by various presuppositions and social influences. The question is not ‘will there be presuppositions and social influences?’ but ‘which presuppositions will guide our interpretation?’ Are they biblical or secular, and why? Additionally, what role does the church play in aiding the understanding of Scripture, particularly through preaching? Our proposal, following Vanhoozer in particular, is that the homiletic method which places itself under the Scripture, rather than over it, will be the most faithful and profitable. This is so because only God himself is capable of transcending both the historical and ontological realities that the Enlightenment pursued, modernism proved unattainable, and postmodernism declared meaningless. No one can live a consistently
postmodern, foundationless, and metanarrative-less life as everyone is a part of some drama. The question is: which drama? Thus the Bible continues to speak authoritatively, redemptively, and compassionately into a world that has lost its Way, denied the Truth, and declared meaningless its Life. The church thus remains the most fitting place to read and perform what Scripture teaches, and the means of grace (the preaching of the word, the sacraments and prayer) remain at the center of the church, especially in an ever-changing world.

The pulpit continues to lead the world. Whether it does so well and faithfully is of vital importance now, just as it always has been. In this world, there will be controversy and confusion, and those who preach must constantly study the biblical script (Scripture)—for it alone is the sure chart across the turbulent sea. Careful study of the script and the world in which we live is a necessity, just as the old captain must know the boat and the seas upon which it sails. He who first spoke the theater of his glory into existence continues to speak and act within it—by the Word of his power. By that same powerful word, preached week after week, God continues to redeem a people for himself and conform them to his image. For this reason we happily join the chorus of those who sing, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!” (Romans 10:15). The Triune God has entered history and fulfilled the drama of redemption in its principal actor—Jesus. All of history is thus moving toward the climactic scene for which it was created. The church’s performance in history is not yet complete. She faithfully follows Jesus as she takes up her cross and walks wisely in this world according to her God-given Script. To declare such things is the privilege and responsibility of the pulpit. It is the drama of preaching.
Samenvatting

De centrale stelling in deze dissertatie is dat een homiletisch model dat het gedeelde DNA van de heilshistorische methode in de prediking combineert met dat van de drama of redemption-methode zou kunnen dienen als een effectief model voor de prediking in een postmoderne context. Vanouds heeft de discussie over heilshistorisch preken zich gericht op een christocentrische hermeneutiek en toepassing. Onderdelen van het postmoderne denken hebben de interesse in aspecten van heilshistorische prediking doen herleven, terwijl de kritiek tegelijkertijd blijft voortgaan. Deze belangrijke thema’s worden behandeld door Hebréeën 11 hermeneutisch en homiletisch te onderzoeken, met gebruikmaking van de drama of redemption-methode als veelbelovend middel om de discussie een stap verder te brengen. Omdat preken zowel een kunde (hermeneutiek) als een kunst (retoriek) is, hopen we dat een synthese van deze ideeën de kerk kan dienen: de kansel bevindt zich nu eenmaal in het spanningsveld dat wordt gecreëerd door de voordelen en uitdagingen van het postmodernisme.

Hoofdstuk één introduceert de belangrijkste thema’s van dit onderzoek. Bovendien biedt het een korte uitleg van het doel, de noodzaak en het ontwerp van deze studie. Het hoofdstuk sluit af met een korte uiteenzetting van de vooronderstellingen van de auteur en zijn theologische uitgangspunt.


De heilshistorische prediking probeerde het idee dat de Bijbel in de eerste plaats gaat over God en zijn plan om verlossing te brengen in de geschiedenis te beschermen. Het reduceren van preken tot moralistische, antropocentrische abstracties was volgens deze benadering dus niet consistent met het doel van de bijzondere openbaring. Sterker nog: hierdoor zou God verdwijnen.
uit het verlossingsverhaal. Aan de andere kant van het debat bevonden zich theologen (door de heilshistorici bestempeld als ‘exemplarici’) die geloofden dat de Schrift niet alleen homiletische toepassing nodig heeft, maar deze vaak zelf al in zich draagt in morele en exemplarische zin. Men kan stellen dat beide kampen sterke argumenten hadden en zich op Bijbelse gronden en pastorale motieven beriepen. Spijtig genoeg is men echter nooit tot een harmonieuze conclusie gekomen. Dit heeft waarschijnlijk te maken met het feit dat de discussie niet alleen over homiletiek ging, maar zich afspeelde in de context van de Tweede Wereldoorlog, kritische aanvallen op de historiciteit en autoriteit van de Schrift en een kerkscheuring rondom de thema’s verbond, ecclesiologie en kerkbestuur.

Een aantal decennia later en op meerdere continenten klinken de echo’s van dit debat nog altijd door. De recente interesse in Nederlandse theologen zoals Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos en Abraham Kuyper binnen de Noord-Amerikaanse theologische discussies heeft bijgedragen aan een hernieuwde belangstelling voor heilshistorische prediking. Bovendien heeft de opkomst van het postmodernisme velen ertoe aangezet narratieve benaderingen van hermeneutiek en prediking te overwegen als een begaanbare homiletische weg. Al deze aspecten hebben op de één of andere manier bijgedragen aan een hernieuwde interesse in bepaalde onderdelen van heilshistorische prediking.

Hoofdstuk drie biedt een uitvoeriger introductie van de drama of redemption-methode en zet deze naast de heilshistorische methode met het oog op overlap tussen deze beide methodes. Een van de belangrijkste punten van overeenstemming is het idee van de prioriteit van God als belangrijkste spreker en actor in de Schrift, naast het idee dat de Bijbel een geheel vormt als verbondsnarratief. Deze nadruk past goed in een gereformeerde verdediging van de autoriteit van de Schrift en een christocentrische hermeneutiek die de boodschap van het Oude en Nieuwe Testament met elkaar in harmonie brengt. Tegelijkertijd worden ook verschillen opgemerkt tussen de heilshistorische methode en de drama of redemption-methode, die wel eens net zo belangrijk zouden kunnen zijn als de overeenkomsten. De drama of redemption-methode gaat verder waar de heilshistorische prediking spijtig genoeg tegen blokkades aanloopt – met name op de punten van toepassing en de rol van de hoorder in de prediking.

Juist op deze punten is de drama of redemption-methode opmerkelijk helpend, waar ze als voorwaarde stelt dat een betrouwbare behandeling van de Schrift (d.i. de prediking) het
noodzakelijk maakt de Schrift te lezen met de vraag: hoe verstaat de hoorder door de Schrift zijn roeping het script van de Schrift uit te voeren? Diverse auteurs worden aangehaald om te laten zien op wat voor manier de drama-metafoor behulpzaam kan zijn om over Schrift, verbond en homiletische toepassing door te denken. Het idee van het *improviseren van het script* wordt hier ook besproken als een uitdagende manier om de eigen rol binnen het drama trouw, maar ook creatief uit te voeren; iets waartoe hoorders van preken door gedegen hermeneutiek worden opgeroepen. Zodoende kan het dilemma tussen christocentrische en toepasselijke prediking mogelijk worden opgeheven door de synthese die deze dissertatie voorstelt.

**Hoofdstuk vier** en hoofdstuk vijf vormen twee zijden van één medaille. Beide hoofdstukken richten zich op Hebreeën 11 als case study rondom de centrale stelling in deze dissertatie. Hoewel in geen van beide hoofdstukken een diepgravend commentaar wordt gegeven op Hebreeën 11, behandelt hoofdstuk vier enkele exegetische nuances die bij uitstek te maken hebben met christocentrisch preken. In lijn met een heilshistorische hermeneutiek wordt gesteld dat de narratieve hoofdlijn van Hebreeën 11 facetten van het komende werk van Christus laat zien in de volheid van de heilsgeschiedenis. Verder wordt gesteld dat elke ‘door het geloof’-uitspraak in Hebreeën 11 fungeert als openbaring van “het betere” (11:40) dat in Christus zou komen, die de “voorman en voltooier” (12:2) is van het geloof. De verlossingsbeloften van God werden niet alleen geopenbaard aan de heiligen uit het Oude Testament, maar ook door hen. Als ontvangers en getuigen leveren de heiligen van Hebreeën 11 “de grondslag en het bewijs” (11:1) van de komende werkelijkheid in Christus.

Aangetoond wordt, dat dit voorstel consistent is met de openingsthese uit Hebreeën 1:1-3 en de overkoepelende hermeneutiek van het boek Hebreeën, waarin alles wat de auteur van het boek uit het Oude Testament benoemt, wordt neergezet als een facet van Gods openbaring van de persoon en het werk van Christus. Het is interessant op te merken dat de auteur van Hebreeën op een pastorale manier schrijft over het lijden van de kerk als een vorm van publiek martelaarschap (10:33). Impliciet hebben de heiligen van Hebreeën 11 hun ondersteunende rol gespeeld naar het script van God; maar Jezus was de voltooier van alles wat zij ontvingen en zelf weer openbaarden “door geloof”.

**Hoofdstuk vijf** houdt zich bezig met de vraag hoe de kerk vandaag doorgaat met het spelen van haar rol in het theater van Gods glorie en hoe de preek de kerk instrueert trouw te
‘improviseren’ in lijn met de Schrift (= toepassing). Voorgesteld wordt dit concept verder uit te werken, te verrijken en nuanceren, zonder de traditionele benadering van homiletische applicatie te verwerpen. De expository-preaching-methode heeft bewezen bruikbaar te zijn, maar is ook voor verbetering vatbaar. Een aantal observaties zijn het waard samen te vatten. Ten eerste wordt voorgesteld dat een rigide onderscheid tussen ‘expositie’ en ‘applicatie’ niet vanuit de Schrift kan worden aangetoond en evenmin effectief is in een postmoderne context. Terecht hebben velen opgemerkt dat de hele preek op een bepaalde manier ‘applicatie’ is en dat die applicatie altijd verankerd moet zijn in ‘expositie’. Daarnaast wordt in deze dissertatie gesteld dat zoals het evangelie de band is die de hele Schrift samenbindt, het ook de lijm moet zijn die het geheel van de preek op zijn plek houdt. Het evangelie impliceert christelijke gehoorzaamheid en door op een overdreven manier de indicatief en imperatief in de prediking van elkaar te scheiden loop je het risico uit elkaar te trekken wat God met elkaar verbonden heeft.

Voortbouwend op en verdergaand in de exegese zoals die gevonden is in hoofdstuk vijf wordt het idee van ‘imiteren’ van de heiligen in Hebreeën 11 voorgesteld als een middel om met de vraag naar de homiletische toepassing om te gaan. De gedachte van imitatie verdient daarbij de voorkeur aangezien ze lijkt opgebouwd uit een duidelijker Bijbels vocabulair en minder doortrokken is van de bagage van de moderne hermeneutiek (inclusief liberale hermeneutiek) en de verminderde aandacht voor Bijbelse geschiedenis ten faveure van een subjectieve toepassing, een trend die ertoe leidt dat het vaak moeilijk is hedendaagse evangelicale prediking te onderscheiden van haar liberale tegenhanger. Eenheid met Christus is het fundament van de relatie tussen een christen en God en deze eenheid impliceert groeien naar het beeld van Christus, als zijn geadopteerde zonen en dochters. Preken gaat de gemeente voor in een creatieve, maar getrouwe manier om de Schrift te improviseren en geen preek is compleet zonder dat deze homiletiek sine qua non is uitgevoerd.

Hoofdstuk zes probeert een synthese te bieden van wat de voorgaande hoofdstukken hebben opgeleverd, met het oog op preken in een postmoderne context. Een bevredigende definitie van postmodernisme is niet te geven, aangezien het om een beweging gaat die zich bewust tegen definiëring verzet. Tegelijkertijd is het wel mogelijk om bepaalde trends in de beweging te identificeren. Bepaalde postmoderne uitingen laten een diepe scepsis zien ten aanzien van historie, autoriteit en moraliteit. De gevolgen van deze scepsis zijn zeker voelbaar.
binnen de kerk. Deze ontwikkeling wordt kort geschetst teneinde een achtergrond te creëren waartegen het homiletische voorstel van deze dissertatie kan worden gepresenteerd. De primaire focus van dit hoofdstuk ligt op de invloed van seculier, sceptisch postmodernisme, en niet op de verschillende vormen van ‘evangelicaal postmodernisme’ in al zijn nuances.

Postmodernisme is de context waarin pastorale bedieningen tegenwoordig plaatsvinden. Daar valt niet aan te ontkomen. De kerk wordt beïnvloed door postmodernisme en formuleert er antwoorden op, aangezien het de achtergrond van eigentijds preken vormt. De invloeden van het postmodernisme zijn niet alleen maar negatief: verschillende positieve bijdragen worden opgesomd. Postmodern denken, zo wordt betoogd, heeft vernietigende kritiek geleverd op het falen van Verlichting en modernisme en een hernieuwde aandacht voor het Bijbelse narratief teweeggebracht, in elk geval in bepaalde kringen. Nog behulpzamer dan dat is de manier waarop het postmodernisme de realiteit heeft ontdekt dat er niet zoiets bestaat als hermeneutiek zonder vooronderstelling. Het voorstel van dit hoofdstuk is, in lijn met Kevin Vanhoozer, dat een homiletische methode die zichzelf onder de Schrift stelt in plaats van erboven, de meest getrouwe en vruchtbare methode zal zijn. Alleen God zelf kan uitstijgen boven de historische en epistemologische werkelijkheid die de Verlichting najoeg, waarvan het modernisme aantoonde dat zij onbereikbaar was en die het postmodernisme voor betekenisloos verklaarde. Maar niemand kan een consistent postmodern leven leiden, zonder fundament en zonder meta-narratief, aangezien iedereen onderdeel is van een bepaalde verhaal. De Bijbel blijft spreken met autoriteit, verlossing en compassie in een wereld die de Weg kwijt is, de Waarheid heeft ontkend en haar Leven als betekenisloos heeft bestempeld. De kerk blijft daarom de beste plek om, geleid door het ambt van de verkondiging, de Schrift te onderwijzen en in te oefenen.

Hoofdstuk zeven biedt een samenvatting en conclusie. Ondanks de uitdagingen van het preken in een postmoderne context, blijft de prediking richting geven door het aloude verhaal van het evangelie te vertellen op creatieve, maar getrouwe manieren. Zo participeert de prediking in het verhaal van de verlossing door te verkondigen wie God is en wat Hij verwacht van zijn volk. Predikers in een postmoderne context moeten met aandacht het Bijbelse script (de Schrift) bestuderen – alleen dát biedt een betrouwbare kaart op de onstuimige zee. Tegelijkertijd moeten zulke predikers met aandacht de wereld waarin wij leven bestuderen, zoals een kapitein zowel zijn boot als de zee waarop hij vaart goed moet kennen. Hij die eerst het theater van zijn glorie in
aanzijn riep, blijft daarin spreken en handelen – in het bijzonder door de prediking van zijn Woord. Door dat krachtige Woord, week na week gepredikt, blijft Hij een volk verlossen voor zichzelf en vormt Hij hen naar zijn navolgbare beeld. God is de geschiedenis binnengekomen en heeft het verhaal van verlossing vervuld in de persoon van de hoofdrolspeler: Jezus, die ook de voltooier is van zijn kerk. Van zulke dingen te getuigen is het voorrecht en de verantwoordelijkheid van de kansel. Het is het verhaal van de prediking: the drama of preaching.
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