A Thiselton-Ricoeur Hermeneutic

As we approach the hermeneutical task, one of two questions is often asked. Some ask, “How do people interpret?” whereas others ask, “How should we interpret?” Those who wish us to explore how people do interpret recognize that any text functions on more than a propositional level and that truth can be existentially relational truth. In evangelicalism, as in classical philosophy, there is a recognition that truth is stated through propositions. Wittgenstein has reminded us that words, terms, or metaphors are not themselves the conveyor of information. Information comes in full sentences which contextualize a term to its language game and affirms a complement about this subject. For example, the word “run” may refer variously to stockings, baseball, a track and field event or an automobile. The rest of a sentence provides the language game that provides it with meaning. The metaphor “fleecing the sheep” may refer either to a dutiful

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1 An earlier version of this chapter was my presidential address from the Mid-West region of the Evangelical Theological Society and then published in Doug Kennard, *The Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1999), pp. 117–152. The names were chosen for their distinct contribution in hermeneutical theory and practice, and their appreciation for the other’s contribution. Cf. notes 2 and 3.
farmer who removes the excess wool from his sheep or an abusive pastor; the rest of the proposition identifies the language game and thus provides its meaning.

A univocal proposition such as “God is holy” is defined by the Hebrew word qadosh (קדש) which designates God to be a metaphysically separate being. Biblically, God's holiness is not defined by extrapolating a finite holiness into the infinite, rather that God as holy epitomizes and defines the category of holiness within which we minutely instance the trait, after the pattern: “Be holy as I am holy says the Lord” (1 Pet. 1:16). Likewise, an analogical proposition like, “The Lord is my shepherd” presents a figure that can be generalized as “The Lord is my provider and protector.” However, to rephrase a figure in univocal ways loses something of the vividness of the statement. The figure can be sung, has emotional appeal and a clarity that connects the reader personally to the text. Likewise, the relationship of a series of propositions could be generalized into a proposition as a grand figure, such as a literary climax or a narrative turn, but one loses something of its vividness when you restate it in a precise proposition. The quality of vividness includes the experiential roller coaster as you existentially ride the narrative through its dips and turns.

The performative statement, “I now pronounce you man and wife,” said by the appropriate person in the appropriate context even creates new propositional truth that was not true of the individuals a moment before. When my wife and I got to our honeymoon hotel our first night we found a hand lettered sign from my Dad. Its message had been communicated to my Dad by his soon-to-be-father-in-law prior to marrying my Mom. It said, “Marriage is like farming.
You don't know what you're getting into ‘til it's too late.” This aphorism has a metaphor followed by a univocal statement. Both univocal statement and metaphor are meaningful to me and warm me as I reflect upon their truth and impact in my own life. Without denying or diminishing anything of these propositional truths, there seems to me to be a vivid existential, relational subjectively contextualized quality of truth which is also not extinguished by such propositional truth. So Jan and I entered into knowing each other intimately, beyond engagement, beyond sexuality, intimately in relationship: rejoicing, weeping, amazed together of the wonder, crying together in the hurt, intuitively, sensitively, promising, repenting, knowing the other even when the other does not speak. So it is also with God and us, with the Biblical text. God communicates with proposition, symbol from within a context and genre. He communicates to us through this process in the text, so that we would understand the text and be drawn into a greater depth of relationship with Him.

My hermeneutical approach could be called a Thiselton-Ricoeur hermeneutic in that this hybrid seems to express significant qualities with which I have also furnished my interpretational model. The foundational hermeneutic spiral within authorial context is deeply indebted to Thiselton or those like Grant Osborne who cross the same terrain.² The exegetical aspect to this approach is organized by me through a sophisticated falsification identified with Lakatos scientific method and a linguistic appropriation of Peircian pragmatism. The relational or existential aspects of my hermeneutic are indebted to Ricoeur’s

understandings in a context of dissatisfaction with existential reader-oriented approaches. My hermeneutic has a third level that recognizes my context cannot be so easily fused with that of the text as Gadamer presented because we live in a multicultural world and such a simplistic naivété means that the text is kidnapped by the reader’s context into multicultural language games and loses all but a few strands of truth along the way. Contextualization work such as that by Hesselgrave is instrumental in negotiating contextualized truth through contextual mazes in order to retain textual truth in a relevant re-contextualized way. Such contextualized understandings demand our passionate commitment, and deep trust of God in relationship. The hermeneutical process continues as a critical realist process, uniting and drawing together each of these strands into a rope whose combined strength exceeds that of adding together the individual strands. My hermeneutical model has been tested in a wide variety of Biblical text but it also has the unusual advantage of providing real aid in a wide variety of literature, even the contemporary existential literature since T. S. Elliot pioneered this approach in the early nineteen twenties.


4 Hans Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: Crossroad, 1984 translated from the second edition which was originally published in German in 1965), especially in the third part, pp. 345–448.

My hermeneutical model is a three-level process wherein all three levels operate simultaneously. I find it helpful to academically draw three distinct levels of hermeneutic apart from each other, to clarify major emphases in the process and to preserve us from sloppy and premature fusing of horizons. Such careful precision helps from losing textual truth in the flood of our own context. While it is helpful to explain these as separate levels and at times to focus on certain aspects of these levels within my hermeneutic, I will illustrate them as interpenetrating each other and fleshed out as unified within me, the interpreter.

Interpretation Level One: Existential

Level One is existential in that it allows me to make varied or vivid existential connections with the text, as the reader feels placed in the story by the juxtapositioning of text close to the reader's context. I feel placed in the story by a wide variety of similarities: familiar relationships, confessional traditions, shared passion, similar experiences and overlapping contexts. Rhetorical devices enliven the text beyond mere proposition such as: space, placement, sequence, motifs, symbols, climax, dramatic turns and many more draw the reader through the roller coaster of the narrative account. Additionally, the reader might understand how another could feel placed in the story as they hear how and why the other takes the passage as they do. Perhaps other contemporary contextual perspectives, post-structuralisms, sociological analyses and mythological analysis can be helpful here to sensitize the reader to a host of possibilities but these are not the focus for they can lead away from the text to a host of post-modern reader
approaches. James Dunn calls this process a “dialog” with the text, but he warns, “Unless the text is, at least in some sense, allowed to set its own agenda, it is questionable whether it is being heard at all.”

Such an existential connection prompts a shared passion and motivation to understand the text and work it out into life. The goal of this level is to surface and retain passion and motivation throughout the dissecting process of the other two levels. The other two levels have a kind of precision that reminds me of my biology lab back in high school. We were issued frogs to dissect so, with scalpel in hand, we went at it, making notes along the way and in the end, what did we have on the table but a lot of notes and dead frog pieces. It is quite normal to bring great precision of the hermeneutical spiral to a text and analyze the text in dissecting detail and when you have done the deed, you have notes and dead text fragments on the table. This existential level surfaces romantic and authentic passion, and motivation that connects authentically with the reader’s lives; the search for truth is conducted passionately with a passion for application and relevance.

Such existential connections prompt self-understandings and self-possibilities. There is no need to demythologize to find contemporary relevance. There is no need to press the text through a post-structural grid in order to distance traditions by a hermeneutical suspicion. The existential connections which naturally arise as you approach the text with a new naïveté operate usually more in the positive connection, with the text juxtaposed to life, rather than in the shadow of the skeptical. I am confident that my second hermeneutical level of

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hermeneutic spiral in the text can supply sufficient distancing of traditions without letting such reader oriented suspicion fog the scene. Self-understandings and self-possibilities emerge naturally in the reader’s life as she lets the text itself speak to her in her own context. Now at this level these self-understandings and self-possibilities are extremely relevant but may not have textual warrant, which is more supplied by critical realist qualities of the second level.

So, when colleagues claim to find principles in a text, I see them as implications from life which we surmise when our life is juxtaposed closely to a text. Principles we see are statements of our authentic life. These principles are not divinely authoritative; they are merely existentially relevant to those who propose them. For example, colleagues of mine who preach the book of Nehemiah, claiming to find within it management principles, are not finding divinely authoritative elements in the text; they are instead finding management principles from our twentieth century context which authentically connect with them as they juxtapose the text closely to their own lives. Now I appreciate and read Drucker and other management texts, but level two's hermeneutic spiral will press the Nehemiah text in a different direction than management principles. That is, the book of Nehemiah in its context is a covenant renewal and restoration text, which in reconnecting Israel with their God is a far more significant vertical relationship than the horizontal tidbits we find within our own lives and unfortunately claim as coming from the text.

This existential level of hermeneutics was powerfully brought home to me several years ago as I sat in a colleague's American Literature class. For some
reason we read Robert Frost's poem “Out, out” three times during the semester.

On a level two analysis the title is seen as alluding to Shakespeare's Macbeth, Act V, lines 23–25, “Out, out brief candle life's but a walking shadow; a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury signifying nothing.” Clearly from such an allusion, Frost's poem is about the vapor of life with its transitoriness and ultimate meaninglessness. I could approach the poem with a hermeneutical spiral noticing:

1) *the details from the author's context,* for instance, that Frost wrote the poem in 1916, in the midst of World War I; 2) *textual details* such as the progressions “little-less-nothing? and that ended it.” as life comes to an end, and 3) *the big picture* of the poem as describing a boy who cuts off his hand and dies. However, such analysis can kill the poem if that is all there is. Somewhere in the process it is helpful to let the poem perform its purpose by reading it for all its vividness and voice. So, if you will allow, let us read, “Out, out” by Robert Frost.7

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them “Supper.” At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—

He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand?
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand,
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—
He saw all spoiled. “Don't let him cut my hand off—
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister?”
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then--the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little--less--nothing? --and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

The vividness of the poem draws me in for I use a chain saw to cut my own
firewood. I too know what it is to put in a hard day of physical labor and be
called for supper. But that semester we read this poem three times and unknown
to this colleague of mine I was up a large dead tree four times during that
semester, each time precariously wrapped around that large tree, six feet beyond
the last rung of my extension ladder, cutting 16" diameter branches with my chain
saw snarling at the wood only inches in front of my face. Each time, you know
what I was thinking: “Out, Out” with a vividness that screamed out to me from a
self-understanding of my own temporality and frailty and self-possibilities, “You
better be careful, or you too will be ‘Little-less-nothing’ with death taking you.”

The poem “Out, out” was extremely relevant and existentially vivid to me even
though Frost probably did not intend for the poem to be a mother's warning when
chain sawing is being done. Its siren cry as understood from my context was
vivid and relevant and that is part of the hermeneutical process.
Interpretation Level Two: Textual Critical Realism

Hermeneutics is a spiral within the authorial context, which oscillates between contextual overviews and textual particulars as it tries to clarify the meaning of the text. This is a critical realist approach to text inductively observing the particulars which the text presents. Such induction does not empirically try to get behind the text as one might to bridge Lessing’s ugly ditch and apologetically recover the historical Jesus. Instead, such induction is comfortable in recovering the accounts of the witnesses with their theological biases and inductively understand these texts from the thought forms which these authors portray. These Biblical theological thought forms serve as an epistemic base from which to implement a textually grounded pragmatism (as Charles Peirce located an empirically grounded pragmatism) fueling the hermeneutical spiral. N. T. Wright defends that this is a critical realist’s *dialogue* with a text.⁸

The dialog begins with a Peircian pragmatic proposal which tries to reflect the details of the Biblical text. That is, such overview generalizations (such as: context, narrative themes and Biblical theology) which the interpreter proposes are funded by the textual particulars in the author’s context rather than from subjective needs of the interpreter’s context and life. In fact, nearly all that is known about the context comes from the text itself. When we take up an excellent commentary and it gives testimony to a book being written to a specific audience (which is wrestling with specific issues), nearly everything that an excellent commentary says about the context is obtained directly from the Biblical book itself. The commentator is answering the question, “What would the

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original audience need to be like for the Biblical author to say what he says to them?” This means that most of the contextual understanding a modern reader can have for a Biblical text is actually framed inter-textually from the Biblical text.

A rare instance in the O. T. and an occasional instance in the N. T. of extra-textual contextual information, however, do inform the context of a Biblical text in ways which might effect the interpretation. For example, in Revelation 3:15–16, Jesus accuses the church of Laodicea as being neither hot, nor cold but lukewarm under the metaphor of water since the luke-warm water will be spit out of His mouth. The Laodicean context enjoyed the refreshing hot baths so sought after in the Roman world but more available here, since a hot spring provided their water a mile out of town. Another form of refreshment was that of cool refreshing drinking water. However, the main source of drinking water in Laodicea was the hot spring piped to town, providing a distasteful luke-warm mineral water. The archeological context helps the reader to recognize that “hot” and “cold” are both metaphors of refreshment. Additionally, the “luke-warm” condition is one that the Laodiceans can relate to on a physical level and may be vivid enough to motivate revulsion. Often when such a contextual fact is known extra-biblically it is known through the testimony of a source somewhat removed from that text and historical instance. However, it is in the thrust of the text that this Laodicean condition is applied to their lack of zealous good deeds. The author develops their poverty into a blindness which only Christ can resolve.

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Narrative themes and Biblical theology are also generalizations of individual Biblical author’s texts. Such generalizations are cognitive ideas so I see real value in stating them in full sentences rather than one word (e.g., Center) so that the communication of a clear idea can be accomplished and concerned that clear truths can be understood, communicated and warranted rather than an ambiguous word or phrase which any reader takes in the way he would like. Interpretations have the possibility of being understood when they are clearly stated. Understanding these as generalization frames Biblical theology as our attempt to understand the text in its original context rather than conjecturing something like Hirsch’s authorial intent or post-structuralism’s deep structures which in effect claim to know something prior to the text, such as something in the author’s mind. Philosophically, I don't think we can obtain an authoritative intention prior to the text, and evangelically, it is the text which has authority and is the means of providing warrant. Clarence Walhout has rehabbed the Hirshian authorial intent to be the textual thrust, which still closes down the abuses of a reader-response hermeneutic.10

To claim to know an authorial intent prior to the text is prideful self-deception. However, if the author tells us in the text why he wrote, as John or Luke does, then we have an authoritative textual statement which can be known to be true but not necessarily the whole truth. Luke may have wanted to write his gospel for more reasons than the historically accurate conveying of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection but such extra-textual conjectures of authorial intent are

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10 Roger Ludin, Clarence Walhout, and Anthony Thiselton, The Promise of Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), part II.
unwarranted and therefore unprofitable for understanding the Biblical text even though they help us understand our existential possibilities. If we leave such comments as descriptive generalizations of the text, then they are helpful as we recognize that Luke’s text adds a unique valuing of the poor, of women and of Mary over the other synoptic gospels.

For an interpretation to be meaningful, it needs to be coherent, for contradictory statements in the same time and the same way are logically impossible, and cannot be true. Contradictories should not be believed (for one is not properly functioning if he believes such contradictory statements). In this coherence the internal relatedness of the interpretation needs to hang together.

This is not to shave away complexity for an arbitrary simplicity using Ocham's razor or Duhem’s theoretical approach. One thing our post-modern age has shown us is that truth is often complex; the truths of relativity or quantum are complex, and the Biblical text is also often complex, too. This means that an interpretation of a Biblical text should reflect the complexity evident in the text, and of course not be arbitrarily complex. But here the warrant for the interpretation is provided by correspondence to the textual support. This correspondence compares one's interpretation to the text being interpreted. Such a correspondence should not be a naive opinion that one’s interpretation is identical to the text as, say, a reader response or Gadamer’s fusing horizons. Rather, such correspondence in interpretation needs to be concerned about factors like comprehensiveness (which raises the question, “How well does an interpretation fit with all the particulars of the text?”) and factors such as congruity
(which raises the question of “How appropriate is the interpretation fit with the textual particulars it is trying to describe”). Using these features of correspondence, we can recognize in a critical realist way that our knowledge of the textual data is partial but can be true.

We are aided in this because unlike empirical sense data which is interpreted differently by a plurality of worldviews, a text has its interpretation contained in the grammar, proposition, figure and rhetoric of the text continually attempting to bring our interpretation through successive corresponding paradigms which bring us to closer approximations of the truth of the text. These further comparisons contribute assurances of increasing plausibility, warranting our interpretation as highly plausible in obtaining the author's interpretation and application evident in the text to his intended audience. This application is immediately emerging from and identical to the ethical component of the interpretation, so interpretation and application do not differ, they are consistent expressions of each other. Within this correspondence the hermeneutical spiral involves the interpreter with overview generalizations they have previously made such as contextual features or Biblical theology generalizations from successively removed contexts in the Biblical book, author, genre, progressive revelation phase, and in the testament (O. T. or N. T.).

Notice, Systematic theology should not be brought into this spiral, for no systematic theology is a-historically true; they are all colored by their historical context, as I developed in the previous two chapters. For example, Augustine's theology is wonderful but it reflects neo-platonic strands. Aquinas' theology is
wonderful but it reflects Aristotelian thought forms throughout. Calvin's theology is wonderful but one may wonder whether his concept of the sovereignty of God is a reaction against the Roman Catholic sovereignty of the Pope. Luther's theology is wonderful but one can see legal concepts perhaps more indebted to his legal training, than which are actually in the texts of some N.T. authors. I obviously don’t agree with everything of these four theologians, though I respect them deeply, but at this point systematic theology needs to be kept at bay, for the theological overview appraisal (of Level Two) is the domain of Biblical theology.

To illustrate the features working in my interpretation Level Two, I turn to the Biblical theme of forgiveness and the narrative of Matthew 18:21–35. I go to this passage because it is difficult and requires proper hermeneutical technique to get it right. When I learned to rock climb I learned on at a place where if you did not use the proper technique you would come off the cliff (of course held by a belay rope). So a difficult passage like this helps to accentuate proper hermeneutical technique.

As we approach the concept of forgiveness we realize that there is a passionate attraction to forgiveness among many at an existential level. Ernest Hemingway once told a story about the popularity of the Spanish name Paco. A father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper which read, “Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana noon Wednesday. All is forgiven, Papa.” The next day a squadron of Civic Guards was needed to disperse the mob of 800 young men amassed at the Hotel. Forgiveness captures our longing and desire.
Moving to the level of textual study in the authorial context, the concept of forgiveness is developed by the verb ἀφιέμι and the noun ἀφεσις. Eighty percent (116x) of all instances (144x) of ἀφιέμι are in the synoptic gospels and eighty percent (129x) of all instances (163x) of both words are in the synoptic gospels and Acts. So a synoptic Biblical theology will heavily frame the concept, and one needs to be careful not to define the concept by the mere 5% of instances that are Pauline uses or by some larger systematic theology expression like that indebted to Luther or Melancthon. This non-use by other N. T. authors cannot be attributed to non use elsewhere, for the word is used amply in classical Greek and in the LXX as release and forgiveness. So the word use reflects a theological emphasis that the synoptic gospels especially convey.

The word ἀφιέμι has a strong relational sense. In 67% of the N.T. uses it is used of leaving or permitting people to move from something. The word is most used for leaving, as in, the disciples left their nets (Mt. 4:20, 22; Mk. 1:18, 20) and the disciples left everything (Mt. 19:27–29; Mk. 10:28–29; Lk. 5:11; 18:28-29). Abundant relational examples could be multiplied such as the fever left him (Mt. 8:15; Mk. 1:31; Lk. 4:39; Jn. 4:52), some people will be left to go into the eschatological kingdom when others are taken away in judgment (Mt. 24:40–41; Lk. 17:34–36). Jesus left Judea (Jn. 4:3), the woman left her water pot (Jn. 4:28) and all the disciples left Jesus and fled (Mt. 26:56; Mk. 14:50).

This relational distancing may at times have a more active quality like Jesus’ sending the multitude away (Mt. 13:36; Mk. 4:36). At times the relational sense of the word has to do with permitting something to happen: to allow the
children to come (Mt. 19: 14; Mk. 10:14; Lk. 18:16), allow Mary to anoint Jesus for burial (Mk. 14:6; Jn. 12:7), or Jesus would not allow people to follow him (Mk. 5:37; 11:16; Lk. 8:51). Such a relational sense could also have a more active sense of exclusion, like the religious leaders who omit or neglect God’s commandments (Mt. 23:23; Mk. 7:8; Lk. 11:42). With such a strong relational sense ἀφιήμι does not really have a reformation legal sense of justification, rather relational release is more in view of letting go or permitting an offense to pass from you. This reflects the LXX use of ἀφιήμι, which lets go (Judg. 3:1), leaves (Judg. 9:9, 11, 13; 2 Sam. 15:16; 20:3; Ps. 17:14) permits to happen (2 Sam. 16:10) and releases in the year of release (Deut. 15:2). The LXX uses ἀφεσίς fifty times with 22 instances in Leviticus 25 and 27 (for Hebrew ywbl/ַלְבָּל, year of jubilee) and 5 times in Deuteronomy 15:1–9 (for Hebrew shm’h/שָׁמְחָה, release from debt in the year of jubilee). So that, though the concept is used in a legal sense, the meaning has to do with someone relationally releasing the indebtedness of another. Now this meaning does have legal consequences but not in a spiritual positional level (true for all time) but more on a relational level (no longer obligated in the debt). In general, ἀφεσίς is used of releasing captives and slaves (Isa. 61:1, quoted in Lk. 4:18–19; Jer. 34:8, 15, 17; Ezek. 46:17). Only once does ἀφεσίς appear in a sense that might be taken as forgiveness (Lev. 16:26 for ‘z’zl/קדש) but that sense probably is merely the sending away of the scapegoat. ἀφεσίς is used only rarely in the LXX for forgiveness. When it occurs it translates nqı̂/נְשֵׁי, “to bear away” or “to release from guilt or punishment” (Gen.
13:6; Pss. 25:18; 32:1, 5; 85:2; Isa. 33:24) or $\text{slh}$/TES, “to forgive or pardon” (Lev. 4:20; 5:6; Num. 14:19; 15:25; Isa. 55:7) or $\text{kpr}$/MEH, “to cover or make atonement” (Isa. 22:14). One of the two references of Hebrews use of ἄφεσις is the reminder that one may almost say that all things are cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). While the sacrificial system with its blood atonement is normal for atonement, there are exceptions that do not require blood for atonement (Lev. 5:11–13; Num. 16:46; 31:50). The only instance where Paul uses ἄφισιν of forgiveness is a direct quote of the LXX from Ps. 32:1 in Romans 4:7; so that Pauline justification with its positional covenantal quality does not inform the relational real forgiveness of allowing the offense to pass from the person, turning to a narrative text and letting it perform its purpose by calling us into its worldview, perhaps changing our perspective.

The relational concept of forgiveness is especially apparent in the kingdom parable Jesus tells in response to Peter asking about the extent it is necessary for him to forgive (Mt. 18:21–35). In the context, church discipline corrects individuals so that they would not be damned but actually gain kingdom. Peter realizes that such perspective of forgiveness requires forgiving a brother. Peter thinks maybe a magnanimous seven times of forgiveness is sufficient and out of interpretation Level One we may think so as well but Jesus virtually says to continue to forgive an indefinite number of times without counting (which is the meaning of the figure of seventy times seven). To press this point home Jesus compares the kingdom to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. One slave owed ten thousand talents or virtually the national debt (since a
talent was about 58-80 pounds of precious metal, such as gold). This slave did not have the means to repay so the Lord commanded that he, his wife, his children and all that he has be sold to recoup a slight part of the loss. The slave fell down, prostrating himself before his lord saying, “Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.” The lord of the slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. The slave went out and found a fellow slave who owed him a hundred denarii, which from the ancient Near Eastern context is roughly a hundred days’ wages for a laborer, and seized him, putting a choke hold on him and saying, “Pay back what you owe.” So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you.” The first slave was unwilling, however, and instead had him thrown in prison until he should pay back what was owed. Such a debtor's prison in the first century does not pay the debt, it merely removes the person from being able to earn money so that family and friends might step forward to pay the debt. His fellow slaves were deeply grieved over what had happened so they reported it to their lord. The lord summoned the slave saying, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?” His lord’s forgiveness and the condition of fellow suffering under indebtedness were available motives to forgive. His lord, moved with anger handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him, which, of course, is an everlasting torment in debtors’ prison since there is no possible way that he could pay the equivalent of the national debt. Described this way, this is obviously a damnation metaphor. From interpretation
Level One (such as from our systematic theology) we may think how inappropriate the lord is in forgiving and re-obligating a slave for this debt, but in the ancient Near East context, a master has the right to do this. The really shocking thing about this parable is not what the individuals do in the parable, but it is the next verse, “So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” Jesus develops that the everlasting destiny of being relationally forgiven by the Father is contingent upon our having the virtue of forgiveness. That this is salvific forgiveness and not some unrelated family forgiveness is quite clear since in the near context the issue is repeatedly between damnation in everlasting hell fire or gaining the kingdom at whatever cost (Mt. 18:3, 6–10, 14).

Synoptic Biblical theology helps us to see that divine salvific forgiveness is often linked to the extent at which a kingdom participant forgives others. This is not a works salvation but one of virtues such as faith, humility and forgiveness, which identify kingdom participants as those who will be everlastingly benefited in kingdom.

In Jesus teaching about forgiveness (ἀφέσις) the different levels of divine and human forgiveness are intimately linked. Jesus presents this point at least three other times in a context of prayer and forgiveness: the Sermon on the Mount, when the disciples ask how to pray and when they pass by the cursed fig tree. In each instance, the Father in heaven is the One Who ultimately forgives but each instance connects His ultimate relational forgiveness of others. In the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples are to ask the Father to “Forgive us our debts
as (ὁς) we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt. 6:12). The request for forgiveness is done in a context where forgiveness is already done toward one’s debtors, as evident by the aorist tense. The ὅς indicates “in the same manner” or “to the same degree.” Divine forgiveness of the kingdom participant is linked in the same manner and degree that they evidence themselves to be forgiving people. To make sure that the disciples understand this point, Jesus emphasizes it by further teaching after the prayer: “For if you forgive men for their transgressions (παραπτώµατα), your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (παραπτώµατα)” (Mt. 6:14–15). The Father’s forgiveness is dependent upon and to the extent that the kingdom participant forgives others. When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray He instructs them in a similar manner. Request from the Father “forgive us our sins (ἀμαρτίας) for (γὰρ) we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted ( ödeιλοντα) to us” (Lk. 11:4). Using the same word for “debt” ( ödeιληµατα) that Matthew 6:12 used, the meaning now also includes as a synonym for “sins” (ἀµαρτιας). The linkage to ask for the Father’s forgiveness is evident by the γὰρ; the reason given for divine forgiveness is that the disciples also forgive others’ indebtedness to themselves. In these verses, the Father’s forgiveness is dependent upon the Kingdom participant forgiving others. When Jesus passes by the cursed fig tree he urges his disciples to include forgiveness in their prayer lives, “Forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that (.Interop) your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions”
The ἵνα clause evidences “for the purpose that” or “so that.” That is, the Father’s forgiveness of the Kingdom participants’ transgressions is contingent upon their forgiving anything that they have against anyone.

Interpretation Level Three: Contextual Critical Realism

Hermeneutics is a critical realist spiral from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. This spiral is a textually grounded pragmatic move (like Charles Peirce proposed for warranting empirically grounded pragmatism). Funded by the interpretation of Level Two, the interpreter proposes (in a critical realist manner) about other contexts than the original one and progressively checks these proposals through a correspondence move which compares similarities of these contexts to the original context. The goal is to recover the meaning in the text to the extent that it includes me. This becomes the authoritative textual meaning for me as my interpretation and application. Such an interpretation applied to my context is also often called the significance. The critical realist significance progressively: 1) excludes any of my assumptions, understandings and possibilities which are appropriate to the text, and 2) includes in me those assumptions, understandings and possibilities which are appropriate to the text. This critical realist hermeneutical spiral moves through successive paradigms which try to frame the authorial contextual interpretation and application to my context as its significance. To the extent that this contextualization process enables the interpreter to state his interpretation clearly

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11 Mark 11:26 is not in the earliest and best manuscripts but it is also redundant with Matthew 6:14–15.
and coherently, and there are similarities between the original readers and the ones of the interpreter’s application, the interpreter can reassure himself with high plausibility that he has obtained the authoritative significance for the ones of the interpreter’s application. The clarity of the significance helps to focus and remove ambiguity from the interpretation. Coherence makes the interpretation logically possible. Increased correspondence between the similarities of the original readers and those of the interpreter’s significance progressively gain plausibility which further motivates the interpreter to understand and apply.

If we return to Matthew 18 and compare that context with our own we find Matthew and the synoptic gospels expressing a kingdom presently operative in the world. For example, the parable of the wheat and tares includes the Son of Man’s interpretation that we are already in the Son of Man’s kingdom, which is the world (Mt. 13:38, 41). This present expression of the kingdom will continue into an eschatological expression of the kingdom when eschatological judgment removes the lawless from the world to the furnace of fire (Mt. 13:41–43). The virtuous person following Christ’s narrow way of beatitude virtues is the kingdom participant who will enter into the final kingdom expression (Mt. 5:3–12; 7:13–27; Lk. 6:20–38). The synoptic gospels contain this kingdom discussion and eschatological warning not merely to inform the first century reader about what Jesus said before the cross to the disciples but so that the kingdom participant in the church (ἐκκλησία) after the cross would benefit by heeding Jesus’ message. For example, can you name a tradition within evangelicalism that does not accept that Matthew 18:15–20 church discipline passage as applicable today in the
church? The virtual universal acceptance of the applicability of Matthew 18:15–20 for the contemporary church is strong testimony of the need to accept Jesus’ teaching for today, especially the next verses (Mt. 18:21–35) which develop the need for forgiveness within church discipline. Because we today are kingdom participants of the church heading towards the eschatological expression of the kingdom this parable is directly applicable to us today, thus informing our systematic theology, which means that you may have been forgiven but to the extent that you forgive others your heavenly Father will salvifically forgive you. Likewise, if you do not forgive others, then your heavenly Father will not salvifically forgive you. Now this is not a works salvation (merely including virtues more than just faith). While in our reformation systematic theology “the elect” are justified and our forgiving others becomes an evidence of this, like an Edwardsian religious affection. This passage frames it a different way and a proper interpretation of this passage keeps teeth in the insistence of our forgiving others as a virtue in the following linkage: to the extent that you forgive others your heavenly Father will salvifically forgive you.

Let us now consider a familiar psalm on forgiveness, Psalm 51. We have all read this psalm and have been existentially drawn into it so let us move to Level Two analysis. We recognize by the superscription that this psalm comes out of David’s life as an expression to God for cleansing in the context of his sin with Bathsheba. Furthermore, by form criticism or rhetorical analysis, the distinctive form of the psalm is apparent as a lament. This means that after the introductory petition (Ps. 51:1–2), David develops a lament of his condition (Ps.
51:3–6) followed by petitions (Ps. 51:7–13, 18–19) and his vow to praise God when his petition is answered affirmatively (Ps. 51:14–17). Another aspect of the lament genre is that the psalm utilizes generic language indicating that the design of this prayer within Israel’s hymnbook is for any individual who has sin concern to lament his penitential concern to God with this pattern prayer. This lament psalm begins in the standard formal manner containing an introductory petition (Ps. 51:1–2). David asks the compassionate God of loyal love for cleansing (in synonymous parallelism) from his contorted Gollumized perversity in sin. David then laments the depth that this sin has penetrated his being (Ps. 51:3–6). David’s sin and consequences are so clear that he cannot escape its presence. Using hypocatasis David expresses his sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, Israel and God as only against God. David’s sin is exceptionally blameworthy so that God is then justified to judge him like God had previously judged Saul (1 Sam. 13:13–14). So David’s sin though it involved others is especially against God. David expressed that his sin was an expression of his character; as it were, “I have had this bent, ‘missing the mark’ character since the breading heat of sexual intercourse in which I was conceived” (Ps. 51:5). This is a deep bent of inner character pursuing ‘my precious’ perversity which is utterly incongruous to the design of God for me to deeply know and apply wisdom (Ps. 51:6). In such a condition this wisdom calls David and his followers to petition God for forgiveness, cleansing and restoration (Ps. 51:7–12). David asks God for deep internal cleansing after the models of sacrificial cleansing which uses a branch of hyssop dipped in blood to sprinkle the one in need and a baptism that washes uncleanness away (e.g.,
Lev. 14:4; Num. 18:18). The goal is a cleanness whiter than new fallen snow, as when the sun reflects off it so that the white becomes blindingly reflective of character. Such sin ostracizes the sinner from the congregation so David petitions for the privilege of being able to be united back within the communal joy and gladness (Ps. 51:8). This sin has deeply affected David's own bodily life removing joy under the weight of the divine vise screwed tightly by David's own sin, so David asks God for the ability to join in with the congregational joy.

God's presence which destroys sin and sinners, like Saul who became a personal catastrophe divinely rejected from being king and unusable for God's purposes (1 Sam. 13:13–14) becomes a motive for David to ask for the eradication of his sin without being cast off from divine service (Ps. 51:9, 11). Such a cleansing is asked to penetrate to the heart of David's thought life and will so that David would be steadfastly faithful from now on (Ps. 51:10, 12). This transformation from an inclination to that of deep responsive cleanness is brought about by God in the same way as his usability as king is brought about by Spirit enablement.

Having seen the Spirit depart from Saul in his disobedience (1 Sam. 16:13–14), David begs for God's mercy to not take the Holy Spirit from himself. We Christians have better promises than this being sealed and indwelt by the Spirit permanently. It is only through such a full remedy as David has petitioned which will restore him joyfully to the usable way of Kingdom.

As a motive to add leverage to David's petition, he vows to praise God with His divine aid (Ps. 51:13–17). This praise includes a pledge to teach sinners God's ways and to recover them to God. If the multiple death sentences "bloods"
for adultery and murder) are removed from hanging over David by the God of salvation, David pledges to sing praise of God's righteousness (Ps. 51:14–15). David would willingly bring a sacrifice but within his highhanded sin no sacrifice pleases God except the crushed brokenness of himself as the sinner (Ps. 51:16–17). David prays for continued prosperity for Jerusalem, for he realizes as sinning king he has put that in jeopardy (Ps. 51:18). David asks for Jerusalem's walls to be built up, perhaps alluding to the construction of the temple walls. In a later day this prayer could have the extended change of significance framed by the physical renewal of Nehemiah's construction of the walls after Israel's sin and captivity. Within the continued favor of God's provision are realized an abundance of sacrifices appropriately given to God (Ps. 51:19). We evangelicals have the altered condition of Christ having died as atonement sacrifice rendering burnt offerings inappropriate (Heb. 10:1–18). So, a Christian's petition for prosperity for Jerusalem so that sacrifices would be appropriately offered to God further changes the significance to a petition for the divine Kingdom to arrive in its eschatological form (Ezek. 40–46), which is an eschatological extension of David's prayer. Now it seems to me that this psalm should be prayed by Christians with the slight modifications of significance noted even though it came out of Israel's prayer book. However, the genre of prayers are performative speech which is not merely to be analyzed, for if one only interprets them without then praying them we rape the text (treating it as merely a testimony) and diminish ourselves (not governing our lives by the genre nature of the Scriptures).
So for performative texts, such as psalms, there is a place for folding Level One hermeneutic again within Level Three and praying the psalm, so let’s do that.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loyal love;  
According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
Against You supremely have I sinned,  
And done what is evil in Your sight,  
So that You are justified when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.  
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,  
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.  
Purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.  
Hide Your presence from my sins,  
And blot out my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your Presence and  
Do not reduce the Holy Spirit's enablement for service.  
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways  
And sinners will be converted to You.  
Deliver me from divine death sentences, O God of my salvation;  
My tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.  
O Yahweh, open my lips,  
That my mouth may declare Your praise.  
For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;  
You are not pleased with burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.  
By Your favor do good to Zion;  
Build up the kingdom walls of Jerusalem.  
Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,  
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Now sometimes the textual meaning of a text may include others and not me because those to whom the text goes are different than me in ways which that
text accentuates or other texts clarify. For example, no Christian tradition appropriates the command of 2 Kings 5:10 as for today. The text is quite clear that this is a specific command for Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times to be clean from leprosy. This fact does not make that text irrelevant to us for we see in it a dramatic narrative of Yahweh's power to heal and to interactively protect His people Israel through the ministry of His prophet.

Likewise, Jesus’ second person statements directly to the disciples in the upper room discourse of John 13–16 appear to have lots of textual particulars indicating that the immediate group of disciples in the upper room are those who are promised and commanded by the second person statements, most of which are plural and will be reflected in English by the American Southern expression “you all.” The disciples are the ones who have been with Jesus (Jn. 14:9; 15:27; 16:4, 16–17). The disciples are those to whom Jesus said, "I have spoken to you all (Jn. 13:19; 14:25, 29; 15:11; 16:1, 4, 12, 15, 25, 33, 17:6). Jesus tells the disciples about His betrayal by one in their midst with words like, “I am telling you all before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you all may believe that I am” (Jn. 13:19; 14:29; 16:4). Jesus then said to Judas Iscariot, “What you do, do quickly” (Jn. 13:27). Then Jesus tells Peter, “A cock will not crow until you deny Me three times” (Jn. 13:38). We recognize that these are not promises or commands to the Christian. Then Jesus starts talking about His impending departure from the disciples in the near context in second person says, “Little children I am with you all a little while longer. You all shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you all also, Where I am going, you all cannot
come” (Jn. 13:33, 36; 14:2–3, 18; 16:7, 16–17, 28). All these statements trouble
the disciples and the disciples present are those who Jesus comforts with, “Let not
your heart be troubled” (Jn. 14:1, 27; 16:20, 22). Now most evangelical traditions
recognize that the disciples in the upper room are the audience commanded and
that is why most of us do not maintain an ordinance of foot washing when Jesus
said, “If I the Lord and Teacher, washed all your feet, you all also ought to wash
one another’s feet” (Jn. 13:14). However, most of our traditions are sloppy in
appropriating for ourselves certain upper room statements which appear to be
reserved for the disciples in the upper room in the same manner. For example,
Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to aid these disciples with Him in the upper room,
“I have spoken to you all, while abiding with you all. But the Helper, the Holy
Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach all of you all things,
and bring to all your remembrance all that I said to you all,” and again, “I have
many more things to say to you all, but you all cannot bear them now. But when
He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you all into all the truth; for He will
not speak on His own initiative but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will
disclose to you all what is to come.” (Jn. 4:26; 16:12–15). Immediately following
both of these statements Jesus talks about His impending departure, “A little
while, and you all will no longer behold Me” (Jn. 14:27–28; 16:16–19).

This means that John 14:26 and 16:12–15 are special promises of Spirit
revelation to the eleven disciples present in the upper room so that they might
remember Jesus’ words in the inspiration of Scriptures and its communication to
found Christianity, and they are not promises to the Christian of Holy Spirit
enablement to help the Christian properly interpret Bible passages. Now these foundational inspiration promises still have great benefit for we Christians, in that it reassures us that John wrote these statements right by the Spirit’s aid. Notice also there are several statements in the upper room discourse in the third person which may include us directly but no statements of a Holy Spirit illumination aid for us (Jn. 14:23–24; 15:6, 23; 16:8–11, 21). It seems to be that there are a few points of our systematic theologies and traditions that need to give way for the warranted truth of the Scripture. Which means that if we embrace a methodology of remaining inter-textual to our tradition as the governing rubric, we then depart from truth and the Bible at certain points. It would be better to exclude any assumptions and doctrinal beliefs inappropriate to the Biblical text and remain inter-textual with the truth as contained in the Biblical text.

Let us now explore an epistle such as Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. In many respects the American church today is the same as Paul and the Corinthian church, we are fairly cosmopolitan, mobile and well traveled. We are like them in preaching Christ crucified and raised as a blatant simple gospel. There are sinners among our churches who need to be connected. There are ignorant among our churches who need compassionate instruction and exhortation.

There are mature Christians among our churches who recognize the gospel as the wisdom of God while some academics in our fields consider this gospel of ours to be utter foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23–24; 2:6–8). Paul instructs and corrects a church like this in 1 Corinthians 2:6–16. In Paul’s day rulers had rejected the
gospel as demonstrated by their killing Christ (1 Cor. 2:6–8). However, this simple gospel has extensive kingdom benefits prepared for those who love God (1 Cor. 2:9). The Spirit of God knows the mind of God and revealed to Paul and the Corinthians this gospel message which the spirit of the world considers foolishness (1 Cor. 2:10–12). Paul expresses this gospel in spiritual thoughts and words, rather than human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:1–2, 13). A natural (ψυχικὸς) man does not accept this gospel from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:6–8, 14) because the gospel is appreciated from spiritual appraisal or examination (ἀνακρίνεται, 1 Cor. 2:14). A person who fleshes out this spiritual gospel message is a spiritual or mature person who appreciates this gospel revealed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6, τελείοις; 1 Cor.2:15, πνευματικὸς). Such a spiritual person will not be appreciated by natural men because these men do not appreciate the message which the spiritual person fleshes out. However, the spiritual person's gospel perspective enables him to examine or appraise all other things. This gospel perspective is the mind of Christ, which the Spirit revealed (1 Cor. 2:10–13, 16).

Other passages claimed for illumination are like the previous Corinthian example, such as 1 John 2:18–27 anointing with the gospel. John identifies that we are anointed (χρίσμα) with truth centering on publicly acknowledging Jesus as the Christ (Χριστός, anointed), which truth is denied by the antichrists (ἀντίχριστοι), and their paragon “the eschatological antichrist” (ἀντίχριστος; 1 Jn. 1:3; 2:18, 20, 27). Such a gospel perspective is evident since the anointing is
truth heard ($\chi\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$; 1 Jn. 2:21, 24) as a message that publicly affirms Jesus as the Christ, without denying Him (1 Jn. 2:22–23), a message that brings about everlasting life (1 Jn. 2:25). This message centered on Christ and gospel teaches about all things (1 Jn. 2:27).

None of these passages promise a work from God for the Holy Spirit to cognitively help us understand and interpret Biblical passages. In fact, the mention of “Holy One” in 1 John 2:20 may not clearly refer to the Holy Spirit at all since John only uses the phrase elsewhere of Christ (1 Jn. 6:69). These passages actually highlight that the gospel has implications such as unity and the Holy Spirit is the guarantor of growth such as the fruit of the Spirit referred to in Galatians 5:22–23 or the spiritual man of Romans 8. These passages promise the Spirit's aid in a kind of application, working virtues into life in conjunction with our choosing these same virtues (e.g., Rom. 6:16–23 with 8:4–17, or Gal. 5:16–26 including 5:22–23). So we reflect the Spirit's qualities, but He does not promise any special aid in cognitively understanding Bible passages. So to me it looks like passages like these call us to exclude the unwarranted assumption of the Holy Spirit as cognitively aiding the believer in understanding Biblical texts because it is not taught in Scripture.

This is an appeal to us to return to the earlier reformation tradition of Luther and Calvin who stood on the Word of God as accessible rather than following the later pietistic subjective intuition tradition of Philipp Jakob Spener.

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as contained in Johann Quenstedt (1685 A.D.)\textsuperscript{13} and David Hollanz,\textsuperscript{14} the parents of the contemporary evangelical cognitive illumination view. The related idea of an applicational illumination of the Spirit to move the person to a “living” knowledge of the Biblical text was introduced around 1701 by August Herman Franke, and then published in 1709 and more fully in 1717 A.D.\textsuperscript{15}

Evangelicalism has largely owned the cognitive illumination view of Spener, Quenstedt and Hollanz, with others in evangelicalism joining Franke’s spirit transformational illumination view.

Other texts show that interpretation is our responsibility, to be workmen rightly handling the word of truth with the text limiting what should be said to the interpretation contained therein (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:16–21; 3:16). Now this does not mean we cannot pray, “Lord, help us to understand” when we are in the midst of studying the Bible because of course, God wants us to bring all our concerns to Him, but He nowhere promises to provide this aid and I consider it presumptuous of us to expect that He will help us to cognitively understand Bible


\textsuperscript{14} David Hollaz, \textit{Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum} published in 1707 is available as Acromatic Universam Theologiam Thetico-Polemicam Complectens (Lipsiae: B.C. Breitkopfii, 1763).

passages when God has nowhere promised this aid. Doesn’t this view have a better correspondence in life, too? When godly men differ in their interpretations, the issue is not that someone is not listening to the Spirit's illumination, rather the issue is What are the particulars of the Bible saying and warranting? Doesn’t this also help explain why non-Christian scholars in some of our fields can accurately tell you the interpretation of the passage without personally appropriating it for themselves? So interpretation is our responsibility to accomplish in a warranted fashion and the authoritative application directly flows from that warranted interpretation. This biblical material which we have cognitively understood within our abilities is then worked out in our life as virtues guaranteed by the Holy Spirit and chosen by our will (e.g., Rom. 6:11–23 with Rom. 8:5; Gal. 5:16, 22–26). Doesn’t this also show that remaining inter-textual with our traditions is at times a flawed theological method flying headlong into post-modernism and losing truths. Instead warranted epistemology and hermeneutics are the answer with the text of the Bible being our anchor. I recognize that I have stepped on a number of traditional toes in the use of my hermeneutical method in these passages. I hope my hermeneutical method is not written off because of this and I hope my interpretations are not written off because of this.

These are difficult passages yet they nicely showcase sensitivities and decisions we need to make in the hermeneutical process for us to get warranted truth from the Biblical text. In many passages the contemporary evangelical person may obtain truth without doing all these steps because the passage is easy to understand and lines up with the tradition, but the best way of warranting your
interpretation is to be precise in your use of proper hermeneutical method even in
easier passages. Furthermore, difficult passages such as these require proper
hermeneutical method for the truth to be obtained from the passage.

Let us look at one more difficult passage that accentuates
contextualization decisions evident in the transposition of the original context's
interpretation and application into our context to the extent that its significance
includes us. The passage is 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Let us read the passage to
allow for hermeneutical Level One to contribute. The passage follows an appeal
to edify one another, imitating Paul as he imitates Christ.

2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold
firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you
to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head
of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. 4 Every man who has
something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head.
5 But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or
prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her
whose head is shaved. 6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her
also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her
hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. 7 For a man ought
not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but
the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man does not originate from woman,
but woman from man; 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's
sake, but woman for the man's sake. 10 Therefore the woman ought to
have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11
However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man
independent of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so
also the man has his birth through the woman, and all things originate
from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to
God with head uncovered. 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if
a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him. 15 but if a woman has long
hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16
But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor
have the churches of God.

To many of us the passage may sound strange. Some may wonder about the
woman's ministry role, the foreign-to-us nature of prophecy, or ask the question
“Does nature really tell us much about the length of hair?” Now let us enter into Level Two’s hermeneutical spiral within the authorial context.

The Corinthian church had remembered aspects of the Christian traditions but it seems that there are aspects which Paul needs to correct and this passage leads off these connections which extend to improprieties in the Lord’s Supper and the use of gifts (1 Cor. 11:2). The concept of head (κεφαλή) is used by Paul 35% of the time and in this passage in a univocal way as the physical head uncovered or with hair, veil or something on it (1 Cor. 11:4 at least the first one, 5 at least first and third, 6, 7, 10). The concept of head is also used analogically as a metaphor (1 Cor. 1:3, perhaps the second reference in 4 and 5). Some traditions will see the essence of this metaphoric meaning of κεφαλή as source by appealing to classical Greek usage which permits it and the explanation of origination in verses 8 and 9. Other traditions see the essence of this metaphoric meaning of κεφαλή as authority by appealing to Pauline theology. That is, sixty-five percent of Paul’s use of κεφαλή and the near context authority (ξουσία) issue in verse 10 and the issue of disgrace (καταισχύνει in verses 4 and 5) prefer the second view. In Colossians κεφαλή must be authority and not source because Christ is viewed as the head of the church sourced by another. Christ is head over every man as authority over all things (Eph. 1:27), and all powers (Col. 2:10). In Ephesians 5:23 the headship of Christ over the church parallels the husband’s headship over his wife. So in Paul’s thought when ἀνήρ is head of τῇ γυναικί it probably means not all men over all women in the church but rather a particular
role of authority in marriage that the husband is to fulfill in loving, nourishing and
cherishing his wife (Eph. 5:23, 25, 28–29). In this sort of relationship the wife is
to be submissive (ὑποτασσόµενοι) as all Christians are to be in the fear of Christ
(since the verb of Eph. 5:22 is implied from 5:21). Such a role of wives
submitting to caring husbands should not be odious but it has implications. In 1
Corinthians 11:3 κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἄνὴρ is best seen as the husband is the
head of his wife after the parallel from Ephesians 5:23 ἄνὴρ ἐκείνῳ κεφαλὴς
γυναικὸς. In both places Christ’s authority over the church serves as a model of
care and submissiveness. Additionally, Christ submits to God as His head,
showing us a model of edification which we are to imitate as Paul does as well (1
Cor. 11:3). The Christian man shows he submits to Christ by not covering his
head when he prays or prophesies, for it he has something on his head at those
select times he disgraces his head (1 Cor. 11:4).

Now prophecy is not preaching, for every time a message of a prophecy is
contained in the Bible the message includes predictive statements or foretelling
amid the forth-telling statements. Prophecy is not teaching since they are two
separate gifts (1 Cor. 12:20; Rom. 12:6–7), though Christians learn from prophecy
(1 Cor. 14:31). Prophecy is not exhortation since they are two separate gifts
(Rom. 12:6, 8), though prophecy can exhort (1 Cor. 14:31). εὐαγγέλιον
preaching is gospel proclamation and not to be seen as identical to prophecy
though prophecy can preach the gospel (e.g., Acts 2). The pastor-teacher is not a
prophet since they are two separate gifts (Eph. 4:11). Prophets foretold the future
in the authorial context, so through Level Three the command in 1 Corinthians 4 may be slightly irrelevant to a contemporary situation, if prophecy is not the public speech one expresses.

While prophecy may be restricted to only those so gifted by the Spirit, the inclusion of public prayer in this discussion opens the relevancy for this text to include all who pray publicly.

If a Christian man led public prayer then in the first century he should not wear a head covering or he would shame Christ. However, in the first century there is almost no evidence of men wearing a hat or prayer shawl from Roman, Greek or Jewish culture though in Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, volume 9, paintings from a temple in Pompeii depict a priest with a winged hat (fig. 98), and a prophet with the *himation* part of his tunic covering his head (fig. 99). Such a command to not wear a head covering contextualized to contemporary North America is no trouble since the first world society encourages men to remove their hats (if they are wearing them at all) when they come inside or when they pray as a matter of propriety. How does this transfer to a context like an American Indian or African tribe where a clan leader identifies his role in the clan by his headdress? Perhaps such clan authority indicators are to be removed to submit ultimately to Christ’s authority when they pray publicly.

Back in the first century Greek women used nets, hair bags, kerchiefs and a body shawl (*himation*) which could be thrown over their head, especially at weddings and funerals. Paul addresses that when a woman who ministers through

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public prayer or prophecy, she must be properly attired or her husband is
disgraced (1 Cor. 11:5). In my critical realist perspective the testimony of Gordon
Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 509, note 71 shows many first century
women of Pompeii with or without head coverings and no established pattern; this
means I moved my trust from the testimony of F. W. Grosheide (*Commentary on
the First Epistle to the Corinthians*), to the closer empirically based testimony of
Lucian, whom Fee follows.\(^{17}\) The views presented by Fee of these first century
Pompeii sources are further corroborated by Anthony Thiselton, and the
contemporary and classical sources he cites.\(^{18}\) The role of corroboration among
careful scholarship helps to reassure the interpreter that his view is likely to be
correct. So that, if a woman prayed or prophesied publicly without an appropriate
head covering there was a confusion of gender roles. As such she has entered the
disgraceful role of mannishness illustrated by Lucian in *The Runaways* as a
fugitive wife with hair clipped, hiding among the slaves\(^{19}\) and a lesbian who had
shaved her head like an athlete.\(^{20}\) Either clipped or shaved hair indicates shame of
rebellion to the submissiveness a wife should manifest to her husband (1 Cor.
11:6). Her submissiveness honors the man since she is his glory (1 Cor. 11:7).


This issue of submissiveness is rooted beyond culture in the order and purpose of the original creation of Adam and Eve and observed by transcultural beings, namely angels (1 Cor. 11:8–10), so the submissiveness issue is not to be written off or reduced to a cultural issue though Paul does reflect the cultural propriety of the first century. This view explained here from first century sources was affirmed and mandated as the appropriate way to take this passage in 325 A.D. at the Council of Gangra, canon 17.\footnote{Council of Gangra, canon 17 in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 2nd series, vol. 14, p. 99; Gratien, \textit{Corpus Juris Canonici}, (Graz: Akademische druck u. verlagsanstalt, 1959 following Coloniae Munatianae Impensis E. & J. R. Thurnisiorum, 1717and Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1928), volume 1, \textit{Decretum Gratiani}, Pars. 1, Dist. 30, c.iij.}

The first century Christian wife evidences this submissiveness by a culturally meaningful head covering as a symbol of recognition of authority when she ministers in certain ways. Such living within the submissive roles unto Christ or husband retains both husband and wife as interdependently interrelated. That is, the husband and wife are unable to be independent as is graphically illustrated from Eve's coming from Adam and all other males being birthed by their mothers (1 Cor. 11:11–12). Paul recognizes that the natural order or the way things are from the first century perspective requires Christian wives to cover their heads when they pray in public and that the gender roles are evidenced by shortness of men's hair and length of women's hair (1 Cor. 1:13–15). This natural perspective is also the first century traditional perspective for the churches (1 Cor. 11:16). Since the whole argument for reflecting the submissiveness of a wife to her husband has been expressed by description, tradition, propriety and shame, rather than outright command, it may indicate this discussion is not as important as the
Lord's Supper discussion that follows, but the inclusion of this teaching in the Biblical text shows this teaching to be important in its own right. Since women's head coverings and hair have lost meaning in our American first world culture, perhaps a way of manifesting the everlasting truth of submission of a Christian wife to her husband may be shown today by culturally meaningful expression which present the wife in ways that do not confuse gender roles or display rebellion. This rule of thumb would still provide guidance as to a range of styles, which of course, would change from culture to culture. In South African public prayer, for instance, a wife is required to wear a skirt whereas at my Chicago church some expression of femininity amidst the jeans culture would be required of a woman who prays publicly; "butch" appearance is excluded as inappropriate.

My hermeneutical method maintains three levels: 1) existential, 2) hermeneutical spiral within authorial context, and 3) hermeneutical spiral between contexts. Unless your hermeneutic has these components you are probably cutting the passage short for what it has to say or you are reducing the interpretation or contextualization process to too naive a level. Proper hermeneutics is our responsibility; do not try to do the task with too simplistic a methodology.
INTERPRETATION
is a three level process
in which all three levels operate simultaneously

LEVEL ONE: EXISTENTIAL

The reader feels placed in the story by:
familiar relationships, confessional traditions, shared passion, similar experiences,
overlapping contexts and rhetorical devices (space, placement, motifs, symbols,
climax ...)

Which all prompt:
1 and 2: Shared passion and motivation to understand and work it out into life. (The
goal of this level is to surface and retain passion and motivation throughout
the dissecting process of the other two levels).

3 and 4: Self understanding and self possibilities (i.e. Principles are implications for
our life which we surmise when our life is juxtaposed closely to a text.
These principles are not divinely authoritative; they are merely existentially
relevant to those who propose them).

Interpretation Level Two:
Hermeneutical Spiral
Within Authorial Context

Overview
(e.g. Context, Narrative themes,
Biblical theology...)

Particulars
(e.g. grammar, small figures,
rhetorical devices...)

Author
Readers

Authorial Context

Reader's Context

Me
Now

Hermeneutics is a spiral within the authorial context from contextual overviews
to textual particulars which clarifies the meaning in the text. The goal is to
understand the meaning in the text for the author and readers of the original
context. To the extent that the meaning is clear and coherent, and has textual
support, I can reassure myself with high plausibility that I have obtained the
author's interpretation and application for them.
Hermeneutics is a spiral from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader which progressively:

1. excludes any of my assumptions, understandings and possibilities which are inappropriate to the text, and

2. includes in me those assumptions, understandings and possibilities which are appropriate to the text. The goal is to recover the meaning in the text to the extent that it includes me. This becomes the authoritative textual meaning for me as my interpretation and application. This textual meaning may actually include others and not me. Then my textual meaning is my interpretation which these others should apply, and not me. To the extent that I can state this interpretation clearly, coherently, and these are similarities between the original readers and the ones of my application, I can reassure myself with high plausibility that I have obtained the authoritative interpretation and application for now. This sense of high plausibility adds motivation to understand and apply.