

Trinity Te Deum

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The following is a review essay I wrote of *What Does This Mean : Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*. This is review of the 1997 second edition. I wrote this and presented it to 12 confessional Missouri Synod pastors in March 1999. I did this because the Reverend Doctor Ken Schurb, then Assistant to the President of the LCMS, said that in talking exegesis (interpreting the Scripture) with seminarians from either St. Louis or Fort Wayne trained using this book, he had no idea what they were talking about. This led me to buying and reviewing the book.

At the end of the presentation. To a man, they all agreed this book published by the Missouri Synod's publishing house was not doctrinally sound. They wanted to sign a letter challenging its doctrinal review. I said it would mean more if they each wrote a letter. In any event, I did. After months they sent back a letter that the book was fine. I wrote back saying that I was prepared to be wrong, but I expected them to send back what I had sent them – all that follows – marked up showing my errors. A year went by. No reply. I wrote to one of the seminary professors on the doctrinal review committee. He was from Fort Wayne. He wrote back that I was indeed right but that there were other ways to handle these things.

When I brought this matter up at the 2016 Association of Confessing Evangelical Congregation, the Reverend Doctor Martin Noland, a better theologian than I, said that the 2003 edition fixed all the errors. I have not read that edition. Based on six men who went through the Fort Wayne seminary from 2003 to 2012, I don't think so.

The Good Things in *What Does This Mean?*

p. 74 "Textual criticism is an art-form, not a science." Good warning against putting scientific certainty behind the conclusions of textual critics. Should cause us to look at variant readings harder and not be so afraid of rejecting a translation's decision for our own.

p. 82 "...variants are, in effect, the first commentary on the text. They say what some scribes, at least, thought the text was saying." They are not always transcription "errors."

pp. 92-93 Etymology - Voelz points out that we must be careful not to assume that words have a basic "real" meaning which stays with them even as new meaning develop and become attached to them over years. This makes exegesis an "unpacking" of what a given word meant at the beginning and using that to illuminate its full meaning later. Voelz warns, "...language and its usage must be studied synchronically (at a cross-section in time) not diachronically (developmental through time)." PRH -The hermeneutic that you must study words according to their *usus loquendi* (the way a word is used in ordinary speech) says the same thing.

p. 103 In order to get to the "whole" of a text, one must understand the parts properly. One must see them in some sort of context and against the background of the whole. Violation of this "hermeneutical spiral," as Voelz likes to call it, gave us in my opinion the Great Commission Cult, i.e. ignoring the immediate context of those words and the Book of Matthew. Likewise, it has given us the Good Samaritan as a do good to your neighbor sermon by ignoring the parable was spoken to one who sought to justify himself and test Christ. And it has made Christ's promise to put fishers of men among us for our salvation a Law text to make us agonize over the fact that we are not the fishers of men we should be.

pp. 107-108 In arguing against the "word" as a basic unit of language, he notes in footnote one that it is difficult for find the meaning of "word," *logos*, anywhere in Greek literature including the N.T. He thinks *logos* (word) in John 1 is better understood as "communication" or "discourse." Erasmus rendered it into Latin not *verbum* but *sermo*.

pp. 108-109 Points out that rules of grammar do not govern communication but communication rules of grammar. PRH -Isn't this why we have "poor grammar" in the N.T.? Rules of grammar first developed not for native speakers but to instruct foreigners. A creation of Hellenistic not classical times (Dec. 1998, *Houston Chronicle* article.)

p. 113 We don't get meaning by breaking a communication into its smallest units and then getting the individual meaning of those units, but we must see it in its entirety and view smaller units as having meaning only within the context of the whole. One cannot be reductionistic but wholistic. Therefore, the meaning of the whole is not the sum of the meaning of the individual parts but the meaning of the parts as a whole." p. 114 "A discourse is a significant composite sound, some of whose parts signify something by themselves." PRH - This squares with Luther saying in exegesis he shakes the whole apple tree, then branches, than twigs. It seems to me then that Mormons/Jews, and I think anyone who denies the Real Presence, can't be legitimate interpreters of Holy Writ (Voelz will say this later on.).

- p. 123 It's valid to warn us about synonyms existing in "taxonomic fields" and that these fields don't completely correlate one language to another. Hebrew word "law" does not have the necessary components of legal, accusatory, and demand that it does in English. PRH - That's why Law can be used as a synonym for Gospel, and that's why Psalm 119 and 19 can speak of the Law in such glowing terms.
- p. 124 Warns against a total transfer of all the meanings of a particular word into one giant "super-meaning." For example, *hegeomai* may mean "to lead" (Lk. 22:26) or "to think or regard as" (Ja. 1:2) illegitimate to say it means "to lead people by changing their thinking."
- p. 124, fn. 5. It does seem to me that a word for word translation such as KJV, NASB has led to much misunderstanding of Galatians 3. A dynamic equivalent translation can recognize the word "faith" means promise or all that Christ is. PRH - The "show me in the Bible where it says this or that word for word" is a Baptist way of doing exegesis. For example, if we insist the Bible must specifically say babies are to be baptized before we will do it, then we can't baptize anyone since it doesn't specifically say we should baptize men, women, boys or girls.
- p. 131 Syntax is a subcategory of semantics. It is normally thought of a special category of linguistic analysis. PRH - This is where "errors" in N.T. grammar come from, i.e. the commentator calls them an error because he has rigid view of how the language can be used.
- p. 151 Idea of Canon is NOT imposed on Scripture by the Church. The Canon represents the signifiers which are to be held together as a matrix and to mutually interpret one another. PRH - Therefore, it is legitimate to find in the O.T. Christ, the Gospel, the Lord's Supper, and Office of the Ministry. They are not add-ons hundreds of years later. p. 242 Scripture is the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit, so it's justifiable to matrix signifiers for interpretation across Books and authors. p.262 We can legitimately matrix the earthquake of Philippi with the description of the Lord's Visitation at the end of days in Is. 34 and Ze. 3 and understand it as an eschatological [end time] manifestation of the kingdom of God. PRH - We can connect Levitical laws to Christ not to healthy lifestyles.
- p. 152 All parts of an "interpretive matrix" are not equal. Some are more critical to the overall interpretation than others. PRH - The distinction between homologoumena and antilegomena, which delivers us from the tyranny of Revelation foisted on us by millennialist, says the same thing. So does Luther saying that he would quote Christ against your Scripture.
- p. 163 Raises a very good question. Are we to matrix all of these events, the Messianic new age heralded by abundance of new wine in Amos 9, the vast quantity made by Jesus, the noble creation of man from dust by turning ordinary water into the best of wine, and see that Jehovah now stands in flesh and blood among His people at Cana? PRH - The disciples seem to have seen as much.
- p. 164 It seems to be a better explanation of Gen. 1 & 2 to say that God is showing Himself transcendent as well as immanent rather than the traditional view focusing on man, i.e. the account of his creation in context of all creation in chapter 1 and the telescopic account of his creation in chapter 2.
- p. 168 Good advice. Use nonliteral instead of the term figurative because many think figurative connotes "unreal" or insubstantial.
- pp. 176-182 Some good remarks about "God talk" or language about God. I think this chapter bears careful study.
- p. 199 Filling in the blanks is NOT the primary task of textual interpretation. PRH - Bible classes are frequently more interested in what the text does not say than what it does. "...[A]ll too often sermons are preached which have as their focus reconstructing the mental world and the non-text specific attributes and feelings of the characters in the stories." PRH - How many sermons have been preached about all the hardships and horrors the Good Shepherd goes through for that one lost sheep?
- p. 213 Perhaps there is a place for warning us that one should not appeal to the intentionality of the author as hermeneutical key to the interpretation of a given text, i.e., mine is the correct interpretation because it agrees with the author's intention.
- p. 219 Who then is the valid interpreter of the text? He who conforms to the expectation of the author. PRH - So we can a priori exclude Reformed commentators on Sacramental texts, feminist on gender issues, and liberal theologians all together? But Voelz goes on to say objective reading of the text is not desired. p.222 To adhere to the Creeds of the Church gives one proper orientation to the NT. That's why church fathers contended that heretics have no right to use Scripture in their arguments against the church. Voelz cites Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus compared heretics to those who break up into pieces a mosaic of the emperor and reassemble it to make a picture of a dog or a fox. p. 226 Paul's argument in 2 Cor. 3:15-16 is that Jews do not believe; therefore, they cannot be the implied readers of the sacred texts. p. 228 "...[V]alid interpretation of the sacred text can be done [V] only by a believing Christian within a Christian community in accordance with the creedal understanding of those Scriptures by the historic Christian church." PRH - Don't those who shun creeds, therefore, forfeit their right to interpret the Scriptures for us?

p. 253 All the promises of the OT were fulfilled in the Christ-event but "hiddenly" in such a way that the benefits of the reign and rule of God are fully ours but not seen by human eyes. The new aeon is here but it is still masked by the old. PRH - This fits exceptionally well with the NT's idea of Parousia (means presence) and apocalypse (unveiling), the new age is "present" right now. When Christ comes, He is simply "unveiling" what has been here ever since Easter. p. 254, n. 13 Liturgy and rituals are transparent facades set forth in front of the eyes of the faithful by which we look through to the hidden spiritual realities of the celestial world. PRH – The Orthodox call icons "windows" into eternity. We bow our heads at the mention of Christ's humiliation in the creed to express that we recognize it's for us and we bow when the Triune God is praised in chant and hymn to acknowledge His reign and rule are going on right now. We adore Christ in the Holy Supper by bowing, kneeling as testimony that we see this hidden reality. We sing Easter hymns at funerals to express the fact that for us the present aeon, this present darkness, does not eclipse the Light and Life of the world.

p. 258 OT and Christ-event are proleptic manifestations of the age to come. What happened in Israel's history was determined by the future. p. 259 "In this way, the OT is always relevant for the church, for by looking into it, she can as it were, see her own future, because her destiny has always been depicted for her by the OT Covenant people of God. PRH - This ennoble the OT.

p. 268-270 PRH - Can this help to bridge the gap between rectilinear (a straight line can be drawn from prophesy to fulfillment) and topological (branches come off the one line of prophesy leading to other things) understanding of OT? Prophesies with 2 foci are like artistic works that paint a subject in terms of another. Voelz uses the example of a painting of Socrates' death that does it in "terms" of the Last Supper where the artist intends to show Socrates was in a Christ-like manner founding a new religion. Voelz points to describing the end of the world in terms of the fall of Jerusalem. PRH - The end of world in terms of Sodom and the Flood are two other examples. He also classes Is. 7:14 here and says that in one artistic expression truths and characters embracing two places in time are brought together and uttered as one. pp. 270-271 Prophets saw present/near future and the eschatological future. They tried to express this connection in words. Antiochene interpreters of the 4th century called this *theoria*. In recent times this has been called typology. Voelz would rather avoid that term because of the excesses of that school of thought.

pp. 289-292 Performative Speech is speech acts that accomplish something in the very act of doing them. Marriage vows are his example. So when Lord says in Je. 21 that He setting before them the way of life and death, He is not merely informing them what He is doing but actually puts them on the spot right there and then. Performative speech is only valid when spoken by the proper person. PRH – While I don't like linguistic philosophy, the "And with thy spirit" response in the liturgy functions this way. The congregation acknowledges the pastor has the Spirit of the Lord to do what comes next: pray in the name of the Church; celebrate the Sacrament, put the name of the Lord on His people.

p. 314 Food for thought and a very helpful chart on the two types of parables – ones dealing with the kingdom of God and ones dealing with personal piety - that Voelz sees in NT.

p. 320 All interpretation is in fact application. PRH - Once you've determined what it says you have in fact determined what it means. This is why Bible Classes cannot be of the "what it means to me" variety, as if "what it means to me" is actually what it says.

p. 335 Should not "put ourselves into the story" but see how we participate in the same underlying reality and attempt to find out what the story tells us about that reality.

p. 350-351 Confessions map out the doctrinal content of Scripture. Maps are not used so you can avoid taking the trip but to help you actually take it. Confessions are like pictures on puzzle boxes; they provide a snapshot of the doctrines of Scripture with which we are to piece together the central features of the story. p. 358 But Confessions are NOT a picture per say; they don't exhaust the content of the Scripture. p. 360 New technology makes ever better maps, but the details they provide are always within the boundaries of the old map. So it is with ever new theological study.

p. 353-354 A crucial question in the Reformation, since both sides amassed Scripture in favor of their position, was which passages applied to justification? Voelz says Christ at center and all passages must hang together exegetically (coherence) and must be exegetically defensible within our Scriptural contexts (integrity). His illustration of coherence and integrity are a binary star system which orbits around a 3rd main, large star which is Christ. Sola Christ is what binds the other three solas of the Reformation together.

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Problems with *What Does This Mean?*

Pages 17-18 – Voelz’s basic communication model is Author > Text > Receptor. He says all 3 factors of the model must be taken into account not simply the meaning of the words. In footnote 14 he says contemporary hermeneutics is concerned with the factor of the interpreter, and that this is the key to the presentation in his book.

Page 24 - He emphasizes the autographs have all disappeared, and we have no testimony that any given manuscript is 100% correct. Footnote 1 notes that they must have disappeared early since the apologists of the 2nd century don’t appeal to them. PRH - This is positive to me because they evidently believed the texts they had were the Holy Scriptures as Paul did Timothy’s Greek Septuagint. Also how could we know if we had an original or not?

Page 58 – “[P]rovidential preservation is not a necessary consequence of inspiration.” Voelz quotes with favor, “God, having given the perfect revelation by verbal inspiration, was under no special or logical obligation to see that man did not corrupt it.” PRH – Dr. Robert Preus would not go down this road. In class he said if St. Paul could call Timothy’s Septuagint Sacred Scripture we can other faithful translations. But perhaps the real argument is the difference between what Preus and Voelz would consider a faithful translation.

Page 74 - He says, “Textual criticism is an art form not a science.” PRH - This is to admit its subjective nature.

Page 80 - Footnote 2 tells us scholarship increasingly questions whether there is only one original text for a given book and that the 1989 conference of textual critics assumed multiple versions of the most books. PRH - Why tell us this? Hasn’t this always been the contention of those looking for errors? Indeed isn’t this in fact what they always have said?

Page 87 - In footnote 2 Voelz rejects that a) the basic unit of meaning is the word; b) that words have a definite, constant, or “real” meaning; c) that languages sole function is to inform. PRH - I don’t know about c, but wouldn’t a & b be assumptions of all communication up until so-called post-modern times?

Page 87 - In footnote 4 he makes a distinction between the physical thing that signals meaning and the concept/thought/idea which it brings to mind. PRH -In short, what I say or write is not what I really mean. This is of course a tenant of Freudian psychology. Only in Freudian slips do people really say what they mean. You must always dig into the unconscious to see what they really mean. How can communication take place at all if neither the word/signifier (what the writer writes) nor the meaning/ conceptual signified (the reader’s picture) is the thing the speaker/writer is talking about (p.88)? I do not see how this can be anything, contrary to Voelz’s protestations to the contrary, but Alice in Wonderland: “‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master—that’s all’” (*Through the Looking Glass*, 205).

Page 89 - Voelz appears to me to eviscerate verbal inspiration by asking does verbal which equals word refer to the marks on the page? Or does it denote the meanings of the marks on the page? PRH - How can we ask this if our Lord has told us not one jot or tittle disappears from the Law? What our Lord says is surer than heaven and earth Voelz makes unsure.

Page 89, fn.10 - Signifier = what I am talking about. Conceptual signified = what is in your head. He says “meaning is internal, in the mind of the receptor.” PRH - If this is so, my meaning is as valid as your meaning. It’s true for me, isn’t it? Page 89 - Conceptual signifieds are complexes of characteristics evoked by signifiers in the mental world of hearer/ reader from his or her memory world. PRH - This is Gestalt psychology. We don’t perceive things individually but as complete units. But Gestalt psychology refuses to break things down into component parts as Voelz seems to do. Since the complex of characteristics of the word father to an abused child would all be negative, and if her meaning is as valid as mine, how can I “rescue” God as Father? I have no objective ground to point to.

Page 90 - What should we make of this? “[O]ne might argue about the characteristics in the conceptual signified ‘father’: Do they include natural sire...care and provision...love? Are some of these characteristics perhaps usual but not necessary characteristics/components, making them connotations? (It may be noted that when societal structures break down and there is a diminishing common understanding concerning life and values, these type of questions come to the fore.)” PRH - His whole book is based on these type of questions. So, isn’t this an admission that it grows out of a diminished common understanding concerning life and values? And how can that be addressed when the value I am speaking of is not the one you’re hearing and in fact there is yet a third one which I mean to speak of?

Page 91 - Words and their meaning can and are to be distinguished. At times, words and their meaning can and are to be separated. "i. The relationship between words and meaning is a product of convention and is not intrinsic." Page 92 - All connections between words and meanings are products of conventional agreements, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the people in a given socio-linguistic group or subgroup. PRH - Doesn't Adam's naming of the animals in the Garden come into play here? Wasn't there something intrinsic in them that called forth the name in Adam even as when Adam saw Eve she called forth a name from him befitting her? ii. Words as signifiers do not have 'real' or 'original' meanings which continue and are detectable in every usage of that word. PRH Fine, but i, above, says they do not have real or original meanings at all. Footnote 15 says i is one of the cornerstones of modern linguistic approach, but he is quick to say, "This is not, however, to be understood as saying 'words can mean anything' or that everyone is free to use words with any meaning conceivable....It is for this reason that it is probably best not to say that the meaning is 'arbitrary' (though it is true to say that the conventional agreement is arbitrary)."

Page 156 - Here Voelz identifies Level 1 signifiers as "the most basic level, constitutes what a text is saying." "On this level, one reads the 'words formed in ink' as the signifiers to be interpreted. This level may be said to give the text's 'sense.'" PRH -In classical Lutheran theology isn't this the only level of meaning? Shouldn't we be bothered by footnote 2? It admits that this way of dealing with the text is "heavily indebted to the structuralist approach" which holds that "the structures basic to explanation are not obvious to the naive observer but lie below the surface..."

Page 157 - It is true that as we read the words on a page "things, deeds, signifiers, etc. which are depicted or evoked by the words on the page" come to mind. But it seems irrationality subjective to say that we should read "the images evoked by the words ...as themselves conveying meaning." PRH - This seems very close to classical free association where the psychiatrist says a word and you say the first word that comes to your mind. Whatever word you say, i.e. what picture you are evidencing in your mind, tells the psychiatrist a lot about you. He regards it as having the real meaning.

Page 158, fn. 10 - Voelz rejects what obviously comes to mind i.e. that his levels of signifiers is a return to Mediaeval exegesis with its multi-fold interpretation. He says in that system Level 2 signifiers in the text (persons, things, relations depicted) are also code for other items. For example, Abraham represents the soul in Mediaeval exegesis. So two stories are being told simultaneously. PRH - It seems to me that Voelz's system leaves it up in the air as to whether one story is actually being told at all. Also the Mediaeval interpreter found meaning in his mind, i.e. Abraham represented the soul to him. Isn't this what Voelz does?

Page 164, fn. 27 - After a lengthy discussion on matrixing (158-164), he closes by saying, "It seems that the task of matrixing and the task of finding significance is very much an art and not a science." PRH - Should then matrixing be done in exegesis? Art is subjective. Art is a matter of taste. Where is there firm ground for the exegete to stand?

Pages 165-166 - Begins the discussion of Level 3. This is implications of the text. "[I]t is a meaning seen relative to the author and his community." It is a difficult level of meaning with which to work, according to Voelz because it involves massive "world" reconstruction, not the world of the text but the world of the author. In footnote 28 page 165, Voelz adds that some interpreters use the term implication to mean "those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern of the meaning he willed." PRH - But the author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit, not a man/men. Page 166 - Voelz admits, "It is, indeed, a question whether something like this can, in fact, be accomplished across vast distances of time, culture, and geography." He further says that isagogics is to a large extent Level 3 investigation. PRH - Historically a clear, sharp distinction has been made between exegesis and isagogics (studying time, place, people addressed, authorship). Caution has always been recommended for the latter. And Voelz acknowledges that form criticism and redaction criticism use Level 3 readings of the text. And isn't this why we were warned about isagogics?

Page 170 - In footnote 4 he defines metaphor "as the basic medium by which one deals with reality." PRH - But reality is what God says it is, and if we take God as speaking in metaphors then how can we know reality? "Metaphor is the essential means by which we are able to make statements about God." In the addenda to chapter 7 "Language about God/ God talk", Voelz points out that some language about God is literal such as "God is Creator" because "the conceptual signified evoked by Creator is fully congruent with the characteristics of God as maker of all things" (177). "God is a warrior" is too, but "Lord is my shepherd" is not because we are not sheep (178, fn. 1). "God is our Father" and "God is 'rot'" (Hosea 5:12) are metaphors. He admits there is a difference between the metaphors but says it's one of degrees and not kind, of quantity not quality. "Not all characteristics of the conceptual signified 'Father' correspond to the those of the referent, God..." PRH - But we do not say "I believe God is a father;" we say, "I believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth." It seems "maker" here is in some sense metaphoric because God started from nothing; He bought being out of non-being but 'Father' certainly isn't metaphoric, but those who wish to speak of God as mother agree with Voelz as he points out. Page 179 - Voelz says the feminists are right God is Father is a metaphor as is God is mother. But he asserts not "all metaphors are equal." He says that some metaphors have such a great degree of correspondence they distance themselves from metaphors. They become a "third option." He calls them, adapting Thomas Aquinas' terminology, "virtually literal analogies." PRH - He may be on to something here. He further explains in footnote 1, page 178 that we can know the perfections of God from studying His creation, and we ascribe perfectly to God the perfections which we see imperfectly. That is, 'father' is perfectly true "when

predicated of God and less perfectly when predicated of human beings.” He goes on to say on page 179 that metaphors of God like feminine language about God are intended to convey one or a limited number of characteristics, but those which convey an entire complex are “virtually literal analogies”.

Page 180 -Voelz classes all of the following as controlling metaphors (A.K.A. virtually literal analogies) husband, shepherd, and father. PRH - But should these be put on par with one another? Jesus taught us to say, “Our Father”. In footnotes 6 and 7, Voelz does an admirable job of showing how feminine language cannot be on par with masculine. Cites another author approvingly in footnote 6 saying that all maternal/ feminine terms in the Bible are always in the form of a simile (as) not a metaphor (is). PRH - But God does say as a father pities His children and like a father who disciplines them. Still Father is His name, that He revealed to us and not a metaphor we have ascribed to Him.

Pages 183-196 - Chapter 8 is devoted to complexities of Level 1. The basic issue (pp. 183-184) is that “all language usage tends to be ‘shorthand’. In all of the examples presented in this chapter, a fuller construction could have been expressed and was in the mind of the text-producer (though perhaps not consciously). For reasons of space, time, impact, etc., however, a ‘shorthand’ construction was used, with the receptor left to ‘fill out the shorthand’ from the context (either literary or social).” The shorthand is one of two types. Either the author assumes signifiers that are blanks in the text or the author assumes signifiers under signifiers appearing in the text i.e. he writes nouns and adjectives but has verbs and actions in mind. PRH - Beguiling examples are given which makes me wonder if this comes from looking for blanks and emphasizing them too much. If the Holy Spirit left it blank, we should be glad not to know what Cain actually said to Able. Voelz seems to negate the usefulness of this sort of view of the text by saying, “More frequently than one would suppose, no basic sentence can be found which expresses with visible signifiers the hidden signifiers of a shorthand phrase” (196). PRH - Okay, where does that leave us? Aren’t there indeed limitless ways of filling in with longhand what someone else wrote with shorthand?

Pages 194-195 Voelz speaks of how wide the linguistic net can be cast and says that it is permissible to cast it over Paul and Luke because “both lived and worked in the same socio-cultural milieu...and within a given milieu, linguistic usage is normally somewhat uniform.” PRH - But this in itself is a subjective evaluation. Why not say, as was historically, that since Scripture only has one Author though many writers, it is permissible to interpret Scripture with Scripture?

Pages 197-206 - Complexities on Level 2. Begins (199) with Mt. 4:12 *akousas de oti iwnannes paradothe anexoresen eis ten Gallian*. Is *anexoresen* to be translated “departed,” “returned,” or “withdraw?” The force of the participle *akousas* (after, because, even, though, etc.) depends on how you translate the verb. PRH - I see no way on earth to decide, and, therefore, I don’t think it’s an intelligent question. If we pursue questions the text itself cannot answer, where will we be? We will again be spending our time with what the text does not say rather than with what it does! Voelz too admits (199) that “filling in the blanks is not the primary task of textual interpretation.”

Page 204-205 - Narrative can relate history but be an allegory. Cites Kelber, “**Mark’s concept of a leadership structure of Twelve, and the Three among them, under the primacy of Peter, corresponds to the leadership situation of the Jerusalem Church.** Thus the evangelist’s criticism of the Twelve, and especially of the Three and above all of Peter, could well be directed against the Jerusalem church” (emphasis added by Voelz). PRH - But didn’t those things Mark cites really happen, and weren’t they themselves the point rather than something beyond them?

Voelz then enters into a discussion of narratives that are not historical but nevertheless true. Such narratives say “‘This is how people are. Here is how people act.’” PRH - This is the case with parables, but this is not what Voelz seems to have in view. “This is why it may legitimately be asserted that, even if a story is deemed to be nonhistorical, it does not thereby become ‘untrue’” (205). PRH -Of course this is the only way higher critics can accept Adam and Eve, Jonah, and miracles of Jesus. Pages 205-206 - Voelz is quick to point out that “total accuracy or inerrancy is not the issue here(see below addendum 11-A).” There Voelz says, “[T]o say that the sacred Scriptures are inerrant is to say that their authors are absolutely truthful according to their intended purposes” (239). “Bad, or even deceitfully written, history is still history (even though it may be history which is mistaken), and it does not, through its incongruence with reality [PRH - or more bluntly put ‘through its falsehoods’], become allegory-fiction through its errors (cf. Sternberg, 25).” (205-206). Footnote 18, page 206 cites Watson, “[T]exts which ‘may not render faithfully the details of empirical history...do render faithfully the history of the relation of God and humankind.’” PRH -Isn’t this what the “other side” contended in the ‘60s and ‘70s? What is the purpose of finding inerrancy in the fulfillment of the author’s purpose rather than in the accuracy of his history? I think the Scriptures report wrong decisions by people all of the time. But it is all accurate history. That is what happened. Why make the distinctions Voelz does except because you’re uncomfortable with the historical facts actually happening?

Pages 207-216 - Chapter 10 continues to treat critical issues specifically a. The Role of the Reader in the Interpretation of the Text: Meaning is Interpersonal. b. Intentionality. Pages 208-209 seem to say that meaning is “personal,” i.e. subjective. The reader activates what he sees, makes ink scratching on the page “say” something. PRH - For Voelz the tree falling in the woods when there is no one around really doesn’t make a sound. The reader is “herself” a second text to such an extent that “the interpretation of any

given text involves, in actual fact, two texts” the text and the interpreter. “Indeed, it is because of the presence and activity of the interpreters own person/self as text that there is no possibility of ‘objective’ textual interpretation” (210). PRH -Then a given text can teach a truth that is indeed true for me but not for you.

Page 213 - Voelz does admit that texts do have meaning, which is intended, but hastens to qualify this saying, “[O]ne can never appeal to it (i.e. the Intentionality of the author) as a hermeneutical key to the interpretation of a given text.” PRH – Isn’t the appeal to the *regula fidei* (rule of faith) an appeal to Intentionality? Voelz goes on, “Furthermore, it is doubtful whether the intended meaning of a given a text exhausts the meaning of the text” (214). PRH -What happened to the hermeneutic that a passage has only one intended sense? This is simply not acceptable to post-modernism. Having said that does that mean it should not be acceptable to us?

Pages 217-219 - Chapter 11 continues dealing with critical issues. I was originally enamored with section c. “Valid Interpreters/ Interpretations.” I was particularly drawn by the fact that this seemed consistent with what the early church taught concerning heretics having no right to use the Scriptures against the Church. I still believe that is correct, and I also believe that valid interpreters are those who conform to the expectations of the author. PRH - A note here: one could substitute the word “intentions” for Voelz’s word “expectations.” Then where would his argument be concerning the Intentionality of authors? But Voelz seems to argue that the community produces the text and not the text the community (220). This is the Catholic view and this puts Church over Scripture. Page 221, fn. 9 - Again we find Voelz defending himself against what it sounds like he is saying. This time that the text is a “waxen nose.” He says, no it isn’t “though it is far more waxen than many do believe.” The rest of footnote 9 seems to recognize the objectivity of the text. But then he goes on to speak of a “dialectical relationship between text and community, between the produced and those who produce and who preserve,” which seems to rob the text of objectivity and subordinate it to the community. Can this dare be said of Holy Writ?

Page 222, fn. 15 – PRH - It seems disingenuous at this point to quote with approval Chemnitz saying that the primitive church received from the apostles and apostolic men not only the text “ ”but also its legitimate and natural interpretation (note the singular),” when everything Voelz has said so far would argue against there being any single, objective interpretation.

Page 229 - I do agree that “valid interpretation of the sacred Scriptures can be done only by a believing Christian within a Christian community in accordance with the creedal understanding of those Scriptures by the historic church,” but I assert that the meaning is in the text not in the believing Christian, Christian community, or creeds. The objective text gives rise to all three. Voelz says as much in the next chapter, “The Scriptures, then are fully God’s words - and, therefore, revelatory in and of themselves (232).” But what he gives with one hand, he seems to take away with the other.

Pages 237-238 - Voelz states 3 things inerrancy does not constitute. 1) Exactness of quotations either from the OT by the NT or of speakers in the NT. 2) Exactness in order of events. 3) Avoidance of figures of speech. I can agree with all three although with the Gospels I would prefer to say each quotes what he himself heard. But then Voelz seems to gut inerrancy by saying it “is to say that their authors are absolutely truthful according to their intended purposes” (239). PRH - Can I then say, as has been said, that John wasn’t intending on giving fishing details so there may or may not have been 153 fish caught? Or, Jonah isn’t intending on relating historical facts, so he may or may not have been swallowed by a giant fish? Also, we run across once more the intentionality of the author. Voelz, who has previously rejected appeals to the author’s intentionality and has said we might never know what it is, rests the important doctrine of inerrancy upon the intentionality of the author!

Page 279, fn. 5 – “Words can never achieve anything directly, unless magic is involved. That is the understanding of incantations.” PRH – Correct, neither the Baptismal formula, the absolution, or the Words of Institution are incantations. For then anyone who said them in any situation, as long as they said them word for word would have what they say. See “Harry Potter” where Ron flubs the spell and Hermine doesn’t. However, the words, “I baptize thee in the name of ...” and the words, “I absolve thee...” achieve something directly even if uttered by a secret unbeliever or heretic. In answering “How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?” Luther answers it’s not just the bodily eating and drinking that do these things but the words along with the bodily eating and drinking.

Page 284 - Voelz has been talking about the illocutionary force of words, i.e. what it “counts as” either a promise, threat, etc. (364). He says even after you know what the words say/mean on several levels it’s not clear what they are intended to “count as.” On page 282 he says “paralingual features such as look, tone of voice, gesture, etc., are key to determining the illocutionary aspect of an act, and when these features are absent, interpretation becomes very difficult indeed.” PRH - I would say they are absent 90% of the time. So meaning again is illusive. This seems to me to be just psychobabble ‘body language.’ Meaning is to be found somewhere other than as Voelz would say “the marks on the page.” Interesting that Luther would inscribe the marks on the page “This is My Body” on a table when arguing with Zwingli.

Page 288 - Why tell us abruptly, it seems to me, at the end of chapter 12: “The ability of the sacred Scriptures as the Word of God to accomplish their purpose is called efficacy, and it is to this property that the term infallibility has traditionally been applied.”? Is this how you have understood infallibility? Does not his definition cast doubts on the accuracy of the ‘marks on the page’? Coupling this remark with the early one on inerrancy, then the Scriptures are inerrant in their efficacy, but are they in their facts?

Page 321 - Voelz admits that perhaps the authors did not intend to be meaningful as experiences by readers, but thinks that the Gospel of Mark’s meaning is our own experience of reading the text. PRH - This is where meaning is found in chancel dramas. But this doesn’t square with “Thy Word is truth,” or “All Scripture is inspired for reproof, correction, etc...” Doesn’t Scripture have a much more objective view of itself?

Page 325 - In Chapter 13, Application, we find out then when it actually gets down to applying the text there is a constant interaction between the text and the second text that is in the mind of the reader. This goes on and on. PRH - Objectively, then we cannot answer what does this mean. Or worse, we can answer what does this mean by saying, “Anything.”

Page 340 - Voelz says no text is really complete. “Every text is shot through with ‘shorthand’ and nonliteral usages. It is in the detection and filling in of these that most ‘mischief’ occurs in interpretation and where most disagreement takes place.” PRH - Yet this whole book encourages us to engage in doing this!

CONCLUSIONS

It seems to me we are being embroiled in the conflict between nominalism and realism. Nominalism is the belief that universals have no existence independently. They are mere names that do not exist. Things only exist as particulars. This was the position of Aristotle. Realism is the belief that universals have a real substantial existence independently of being thought. There is a concept of chair independent of sticks of wood being attached to one another. This is the position of Plato. *My Dictionary of Philosophy* says that this is simply the common sense position, and that it exists as a philosophy only because some nominalists seriously reject it. If you are a nominalist then there is no objective thing, no ideal thing. The only thing that exists is the mental constructs, the words. But there is no touchstone to bring them back to.

Voelz does for language what Jewish cabalism did for numbers. Cabalism uses facts about numbers and mathematics that are indeed there and pushes them beyond the use for which God gave them. Voelz uses facts about language and communication that are indeed there - concepts really do pop into my head when I read, what I write really is influenced by the culture I am in, words really can have more than one sense (that’s why poetry, puns and double entendre exist). But Voelz pushes these characteristics beyond their usefulness. Reading Cabalistic literature you get the sense that they are delving into the majesty of God from whence they can only come out mad because they are approaching God from a side He has does not wish to be approached from. Voelz is as well. When it is all said and done, what can Voelz tell us about God? Only that He can communicate infinitely; finite beings are not helped by this.

This may seem like strong criticism, but my strongest criticism is that Voelz is a hermeneutical psychologists. A psychologist, particularly one with a Freudian mind set, does not take words at face value. They stand for something else, for something you’re repressing, for something you cannot face. Words always mean something other than the syllables in your mouth or the marks on the page. This too is Voelz. And like psychology, Voelz gives an air of scientific certainty to what amounts to total uncertainty.

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Addendum

Pertinent Quotes from Luther’s Bondage of the Will

“Take away assertions and you take away Christianity” (LW 33, 2).

“But that in Scripture there are some things abstruse, and everything is not plain - this is an idea put about by the ungodly Sophists, with those lips you also speak here, Erasmus: but they have never produced, nor can they produce, a single article to prove this mad notion of theirs. Yet with such a phantasmagoria Satan has frightened men away from reading the sacred writings and has made Holy Scripture contemptible, in order to enable the plagues he has bred from philosophy to prevail in the Church” (25).

“The subject matter of Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms. Truly it is stupid and impious, when we know that the subject matter of Scripture has all been placed in the clearest light, to call it obscure on account of a few obscure words. If the words are obscure in one place, yet they are plain in another;...Now, when the thing

signified is in the light, it does not matter if this or that sign of it is in darkness, since many other signs of the same thing are meanwhile in the light. Who will say that a public fountain is not in the light because those who are in a narrow side street do not see it, whereas all who are in the marketplace do see it” (26)?

“For Christ has opened our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures [Luke 24:45],...It is true that for many people much remains abstruse; but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but to the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth....Let miserable men, therefore, stop imputing with blasphemous perversity the darkness and obscurity of their own hearts to the wholly clear Scriptures of God” (27).

“...and you say that Scripture has a language of its own, variously adapted to the state of the hearers, so that you think it must be left to the prudence and charity of the teacher to teach what is expedient for his neighbor. All of this is inept and ignorant,... As for your saying that ‘God in Scripture is angry, rages, hates, grieves, has mercy, repents, yet none of these changes takes place in God,’ here you are looking for a bone to pick, for these things do not make Scripture obscure or in need of adaption to the various hearers, except that some people like to make difficulties where there are none. These are matters of grammar and the figurative use of words, which even schoolboys understand” (71);

“It is on this account that I have hitherto attacked the pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly stated or more generally accepted than the idea that the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, so that the spirit to interpret them must be sought from the Apostolic See of Rome. Nothing more pernicious could be said than this, for it has led ungodly men to set themselves above the Scriptures and to fabricate whatever they pleased, until the Scriptures have been completely trampled down and we have been believing and teaching nothing but the dreams of madmen” (90).

“And what is it that preachers do, to this very day? Do they interpret and expound the Scriptures? Yet if the Scripture they expound is uncertain, who can assure us that their exposition is certain? Another new exposition? And who will expound the exposition? At this rate we will shall go on forever. In short, if Scripture is obscure or ambiguous, what point was there in God’s giving it to us? Are we not obscure and ambiguous enough without having our obscurity, ambiguity, and darkness augmented for us from heaven” (93-94)?

“For who is there to make us sure of their light if you make the Scriptures obscure? So those who deny that Scriptures are quite clear and plain leave us nothing but darkness ...I say with respect to the whole of Scripture, I will not have any part of it called obscure” (94).

“For it is not due to the weakness of the human mind (as you make out) that the words of God are not understood, but, on the contrary, nothing is more fitted for understanding the words of God than such weakness; for it was for the sake of the weak and to the weak that Christ both came and sends His word. It is due to the malice of Satan, who sits enthroned in our weakness, resisting the Word of God. If Satan were not at work, the whole world of men would be converted by a single word of God once heard, and there would be no need of more” (99-100).

Fences

A Nine Part Sermon Series on the Ten Commandments
Advent 2019 – Lent 2020

This is the beginning of our sixth trek through the Six Chief Parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. We go through all six every four years. We do this every Advent and Lent in keeping with a 16th century Lutheran practice of having midweek services devoted to catechetical teaching.

We used the theme of “Fences” in our Vacation Catechetical School. Fences form boundaries; they warn; they prohibit, and they can comfort. If you have ever been lost, how relieved you were when you finally got to a fence. Amusement park rides are fun precisely because you are “fenced in” so you can’t fall out. So, the Law, like the hymn says, is “good and wise”, but its chief function is that of a mirror: to show us our sins. “But” as another hymn has it, “’tis the Gospel must reveal where lies our strength to do His Will.”

All services are on a Wednesday. They start at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, you can be out the door at 8:15.

December 4	The Big Fence	The 1st Commandment
December 11	Fences with Signs	The 2nd Commandment
December 18	The Fence that Keeps In	The 3rd Commandment
Ash Wednesday	What’s a Fence Doing Here?	The 4th Commandment
March 4	A Fence Everyone Knows	The 5th Commandment
March 11	A Fence People Want Moved	The 6th Commandment
March 18	A Fence for Sea Gulls	The 7th Commandment
March 25	A Fence People Ignore	The 8th Commandment
April 1	Twin Fences That Stop All	The 9th &10th Commandments

OCTOBER 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
			6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12:15 PM Adult Class	5 PM Jr Confirmation		6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
12:15 PM Adult Class	5 PM Jr Confirmation	PASTOR ON VACATION 15 TH -22 ND				
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
PASTOR ON VACATION 15 TH -22 ND			6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			
27	28	29	30	31		
12:15 PM Adult Class 5:00 PM REFORMATION DINNER	5 PM Jr Confirmation	6:30 PM BUDGET MEETING	6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			

NOVEMBER 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12:15 PM Adult Class	5 PM Jr Confirmation	7 PM Voters Meeting	6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
12:15 PM Adult Class	5 PM Jr Confirmation		6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES	4:30 PM WEDDING REHEARSAL	6:00 PM WEDDING	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
12:15 PM Adult Class	5 PM Jr Confirmation		6:15 PM CHOIR 7:15 PM JAMES			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
12:15 PM Adult Class		6:30 PM Elders Meeting	7:30 PM THANKSGIVING EVE SERVICE			

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