

Scripture is best understood as a sacramental word that is meant to be read aloud, in community, and for memorization. These practices, key to the church's worship, might save us from simply using scripture as an ideological weapon, and, instead, teach us the privilege of listening to scripture for God's word.

Scripture as Sacramental Word

Rediscovering Scripture's Compelling Power

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RECENT STUDIES OF THE MALAISE of mainline Protestantism have suggested that the critical issues are theological. Of particular importance is the question of biblical authority and interpretation.¹ Whether the debate is the Re-imagining Conference or the ordination of “self-affirming, practicing homosexuals,” mainline denominations, while not formally split, are characterized by a wide variety of appeals to scripture. People in the same church traditions read the Bible in profoundly different, even conflicting, ways.

James Davison Hunter suggests two of the major positions that one encounters in the church today.² For the “orthodox,” scripture is inspired and inerrant. It sets forth truths about God. Some of these truths are theological: God is one; God's Son came into the world to save sinners; God calls us into new life in Jesus Christ. Some are ethical: the sixth commandment prohibits abortion; the seventh prohibits sexual relations outside the covenant of marriage, male and female. For the orthodox, the question is not whether we are able to grasp these truths, but whether we will assent to them. Scripture consists of revealed, propositional truths.

Progressivists, by contrast, turn to scripture for symbols, stories, and illustrations that express the deepest longings of the human heart. Scripture does not consist of transcendent truths; rather, scripture gives expression to the human

experience of the transcendent in nature and history. The exodus becomes a metaphor for human liberation; the resurrection is a symbol for the triumph of the human spirit, even in a world of death and destruction. The words of scripture are not so much God's as ours, and scripture tells us less about God than about ourselves. For these Christians, scripture may be a privileged language, but it is only one kind of language for describing the "mountain top," as well as the "valley of death," experiences that characterize our lives. Its ethical pronouncements must be revised in light of contemporary historical and cultural circumstances.

Recent theological and ethical literature evidences yet a third approach. Scripture is an identity story. It helps Christians to remember who they really are, and illustrates the character of the community to which they belong. For George Lindbeck, scripture has a narrative shape that unifies its diverse materials and forms the community's sense of the faithful.³ For Elizabeth Johnson, scripture is a source of emancipatory symbols that ensure the flourishing of women and hence of all creation.⁴ Despite their differences theologically, both subordinate scripture to the good ends of a particular community.

While each of these positions has roots in the Christian tradition, I believe that much of the Christian tradition—and much of the Reformed tradition—has understood scripture in a fourth way. From this point of view, scripture is more than revealed truths about God; more than a language, however profound, for describing the heights and depths of the human condition; more than a story that helps to define and preserve a community (however necessary such stories may be, sociologically speaking). Rather, scripture is a "sacramental word" that points beyond itself. Scripture is "commentary" on the reality of the risen Christ.

As a sacramental word, scripture is not merely a witness to revelation. It sets forth Christ. It draws us into his presence and invites us to be transformed into his image. It opens the possibility of relationship between the divine and the human.⁵

A classic definition of sacrament is "a visible sign of an invisible grace." Perhaps we should think of the words of scripture as "an audible signal of an inaudible grace." When scripture is read, when it is explicated in preaching, when it is incorporated into prayers of thanksgiving and lament, when it frames the celebration of the Lord's Supper, scripture becomes the means by which Christians are gathered into the body of the living Lord. The words of scripture become a window into the Word, Jesus Christ. As Paul says: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:9–10). Which things? "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

Scripture as a sacramental, poetic word

As a sacramental word, scripture is more like poetry than a textbook.⁶ It has the capacity to move us, inspire us, and claim us. It points beyond itself to ultimate

meaning. Scripture, like poetry, is not primarily information about the past, but a lens for looking at the present. In the words of John Calvin,

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.6.1).

Scripture, like poetry, engages our imagination. Scripture is an invitation to construe the world in a different way. It offers us a paradigm, a *gestalt*, that enables us to reorganize our perception of reality. Through scripture, we learn to interpret the world in light of God's plans and purposes.⁷

Scripture, like poetry, is not relegated to experts. While scholars may help us to probe the text more deeply, they cannot reduce it to one right meaning.⁸ But the meaning of scripture is not arbitrary. The text itself imposes constraints. It defines a field of meaning within which some interpretations prove more compelling than others. One cannot get whatever one wants out of scripture.⁹

When the Christian tradition has understood scripture as a sacramental, poetic word, it has drawn at least three implications: scripture is meant to be read aloud; it is meant to be read in community; and it is meant to be memorized.

First, scripture is meant to be *read aloud*. It is primarily for the ear, not the eye. It is important as sound. In some traditions, such as Eastern Orthodoxy, scripture is sung in the liturgy. For some Protestants, scripture does not sound right unless it is heard in the King James Version (just as for some Catholics, the mass—and the reading of scripture in the mass—does not sound right unless it is heard in Latin).

For early Benedictine monks, who chanted all 150 Psalms in the course of the week, the sound of scripture mattered. Benedict emphasized the importance of chanting scripture correctly. Anyone making a mistake was to correct himself immediately and ask for pardon; otherwise, he was to be severely punished.¹⁰ When prayer, seven times a day, broke the silence of the monastery, it was the sound of scripture that dominated. As Wolfgang Braunfels has noted:

In the performance of the daily liturgy Cistercian aesthetic aspirations achieved their apotheosis. There are no available measurements of the acoustics of Cistercian churches, but every one of their choirs acts as a resonating chamber through which sound is both held and muted. Echoes were avoided, each word was to ring out firm and clear. . . . [A]n acute sensibility was developed for the melodic intervals of the chant.¹¹

When scripture is understood as “sound,” we are reminded of the God whose word is creative. “God said . . . and there was . . .” (Gen 1:3). “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). When words “resound,” they struc-

ture reality; when God's words resound, they put us into right relationship with each other and with the world around us.

Second, scripture is meant to be read *in community*. It calls for public performance. It draws people together. As with a great symphony, people sense that they are experiencing something extraordinary together. As a communal event, scripture is a source of inexhaustible meaning. The community finds that it can return to scripture again and again, and apply it to new situations. Much of scripture itself consists of communal readings of earlier texts.¹² The importance of reading scripture in community is also reflected in the way in which medieval Jews wrote out the biblical text and surrounded it with commentary. These marginal notes included both majority and minority positions, thereby representing the ongoing debate of the community.

The Bibles of the medieval church were similar. The margins around the text and the spaces between the lines were filled with a gloss, summarizing patristic interpretation of particular passages. When Luther prepared texts for his students, he left the margins blank. The tradition was "excised," but only so that the community interpreting the texts in the present might fill them in again with notes and reflections.¹³ A "reformed" community wanted to replace the old commentary with its own, as with the popular Geneva Bible, whose margins were again filled with commentary.

But "inexhaustible meaning" is not license for subjective, arbitrary interpretation. On the contrary, Christians have insisted on reading scripture in community in order to test their interpretations against the deeper wisdom of the particular communities and traditions to which they belong. The argument can be made that in Catholicism the magisterium is for the sake of the community. The magisterium discerns and guards readings of scripture that reflect the sense of the faithful and help build up the church.¹⁴

While the Reformed tradition has resisted the notion of a magisterium, it has argued that we need more than good eyes and minds if we are to discern the meaning of scripture; we need the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so that we can receive scripture as the word of God. For this reason, many Reformed churches include a prayer of illumination before the reading of scripture in worship. But the experience of the Spirit is not private; rather, the Spirit binds believers to Jesus Christ and each other. The Spirit that opens the words of scripture to our understanding is the Spirit that locates scripture in the context of a particular community of faith. To read by the Spirit is to read together.¹⁵

Third, scripture is meant to be *memorized*. Memorization depends on sound. To some degree, it also depends on community, for we tend to remember those words and phrases that particular communities guard most precious. In hearing and repeating scripture daily, early Benedictine monks essentially memorized large portions of it. Because they would then recite scripture to themselves as they

worked, they were sometimes known as the “munchers.” They munched on scripture as though chewing the cud.¹⁶ They seemed to take Moses literally: “The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe” (Deut 30:14). The traditional training of Eastern Orthodox priests included memorization of the entire psalter. The memorization of scripture has long been considered an essential spiritual discipline in the Reformed tradition as well.

When we memorize scripture, it dwells in us as a word of nourishment. Pastors frequently comment on their experience of reciting Psalm 23 with Alzheimer’s patients or people on their death bed. People who have previously been unresponsive will sometimes begin to repeat the words or even race ahead of the pastor. Such moments indicate more than a mere remembering that one belongs to God in life and death. They demonstrate the power of scripture to convey the very presence of God and God’s people.¹⁷ Scripture sets forth Christ. It is sacramental.

Saints who have endured the trials of imprisonment and isolation often report that words of scripture emerge from one’s memory and provide spiritual sustenance. One thinks of Dietrich Bonhoeffer or, more recently, of Benjamin Weir, a missionary held hostage in Lebanon. Both men found that fragments of scripture, often embedded in hymns, gave them assurance that God had not abandoned them.

Scripture is meant to be read aloud; it is meant to be read in community; and it is meant to be memorized. If we were to take these three points seriously, they would reshape the way we use scripture in our congregations today and perhaps contribute to a rediscovery of scripture’s compelling power.

Reading scripture aloud

Understanding scripture as a sacramental word that is meant to be read aloud would reshape the way we select translations to use in worship. It would also suggest that we exercise greater care in the way we read scripture in worship. We still do not have a worthy successor to the King James Version (KJV), which shaped the English language and its literature (just as the Luther Bible shaped the German language and its literature). While correcting mistranslations and putting scripture into contemporary English, the RSV attempted to maintain the literary quality of the KJV but never found the same degree of acceptance. The NRSV is almost certain to fare no better.

Many contemporary translations succumb to the general flattening of language that seems to infect an information society.¹⁸ Translators frequently boast that they have consulted the best manuscripts and rendered scripture in a colloquial English that is easily understood. They seem to see scripture primarily as information that needs to be stated as plainly and accurately as possible. This tendency reaches an extreme in the Contemporary English Version (CEV), the successor to the Good News Bible. On the positive side, the CEV tries to avoid “insider” language—an important consideration in a society that is increasingly secular and unchurched.

Originally intended for children, it has proved attractive to many adults as well. On the negative side, these efforts often come at the cost of the poetic. Nobility of language is lost. The power of biblical language, including that of traditional renderings of scripture, is ignored. Jesus is now born in a “feed box,” not a manger.¹⁹ When he comes into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, people gather by the side of the road and shout “hooray.”

Translators have always struggled with how much to dignify scriptural language and how much to render it in the style and manner in which it was written. Similarly, while translating the original languages into the vernacular, they have endeavored to “translate” the reader into biblical ways of thinking. At times, Luther, the translator, asked himself, “How does a German speak in such a case?”²⁰ At other times, he asked the reader to “give the Hebrew some room.”²¹ A translation like the CEV, by going too far in the direction of the former, risks “dumbing down” the Bible.

It is unlikely that many pastors in the Protestant mainline will soon return to the KJV. Its language is too archaic. But there are other solutions until a worthy successor to the KJV appears. James Sanders argues for using the RSV and exercising one’s own judgment in changing its language to make it more “inclusive.”²² Some translators are trying to recapture a sense of scripture’s revelatory power. The translation of the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible, by the Jewish Publication Society, combines accuracy with poetic sensitivity and even assumes that people are capable of using their dictionaries to look up an unfamiliar word. It is a rich resource not only for Jews but for Christians who want to recover a sense of scripture as a revelatory, sacramental word.

Noteworthy is the stunning translation of *The Five Books of Moses*, by Everett Fox. As one reviewer remarks:

[Fox’s] translation seeks to turn us into active listeners by reminding us that the Bible is not a modern but an ancient, demanding and sometimes obscure work whose meaning is inseparable from the language in which it was written.... The result is a work of jolting power and majestic strangeness.... [Fox] lays out the text in poetic lines, which create a sense of spoken phrasing.²³

Besides new translations of compelling power, we also need to take more seriously the art of reading scripture aloud. The public reading of scripture is not a matter of dramatic style. We are not faithful to the text if we believe we have to enliven it. Rather, it is a matter of reading scripture in its own voice, setting forth its language with clarity and reverence, faith and conviction.

The most important thing is to let the images speak. Usually, people try to load emotions on top of a text when they read it aloud. The feeling doesn’t come from within, out of the text, but is laid on top of it. In contrast, I try to note: Ah, now it’s getting sad; ah, now joyous. . . . I need a while to get into a text. Once I’m in, I let it carry me along. It must sound as though I am telling the story for the first time.²⁴

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, deacons have responsibility for singing scripture in the liturgy. They receive special training and are tested. When ministers in the Protestant mainline seek to include readers in worship, they too have a responsibility to train them and test their abilities. We do not have to go as far as Benedict in enforcing perfection; we can, however, convey the privilege of reading scripture in the company of the faithful.

Mainline Protestants may also wish to rethink the wisdom of pew Bibles. When we follow along, the reading of scripture again tends to come through the eye, rather than the ear. We need to train ourselves to become good listeners of scripture. Just as music appreciation classes enable us to appreciate a symphony of Beethoven or Brahms more deeply, we need disciplined preparation to appreciate the richness of scripture as a spoken, sacramental word.

Early Christians read scripture aloud even when studying it by themselves. Perhaps we would do well to read scripture aloud when we read it by ourselves. I suspect that many ministers do not read their sermon text aloud until worship on Sunday morning. The text might reveal more of its power if they also read it aloud in the course of their preparations.

Reading scripture in community

Understanding scripture as a sacramental word that is meant to be read in community would reshape the way we study scripture. The process of interpretation involves a profound interaction between pastor and people, between prayer and study, and between a particular community of faith and the wider church, present and past. On the one hand, the pastor is a theologian-in-residence. For this reason, the Reformed tradition has often referred to the pastor as a “teaching elder.” Pastors have received special training that enables them to help a congregation hear the meaning of scripture more clearly. Listeners should honor them and give evidence of what one author, following Calvin, has called “a teachable spirit.”²⁵

On the other hand, the Reformed tradition—and Protestantism in general—has also insisted that the meaning of scripture is plain to anyone who reads it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Each of us is called to interpret scripture for himself or herself. We have the responsibility to share our insights with each other, even when they seem to conflict.

This interaction between pastor and people suggests a model for Bible study. On Sunday morning, people gather for an hour of adult study prior to worship. The class opens with the pastor asking for prayer concerns. After prayer, people open their Bibles and together read a selection aloud. The pastor then asks them to report what in the passage makes them curious, what bothers them, what questions they have. A conversation begins. Different people notice different things. After half an hour, the pastor asks them to look for the broader theological themes in the passage. What does this passage tell us about God? What does God appear to be

doing? What do God's ways tell us about our lives? Throughout, pastor and people are thinking together. Although disagreements sometimes emerge, a deeper understanding of the text always results. The class closes with prayer.

Reading scripture in community can have a devotional aspect. Devotional reading of scripture is often private. We read scripture silently and by ourselves. Yet we also need to recover disciplines of community devotions. The discipline of family devotions has been almost entirely lost among mainline Protestants, even among pastors. A recent survey reveals that fewer than 20% of Presbyterian pastors with families have a regular discipline of family devotions.²⁶ Few gather regularly with colleagues or friends to pray and read scripture together. One wonders what it would mean for the strengthening of the church if we not only read the Bible on our own more often, but also spent at least one hour reading the Bible with others for every hour that we spend reading it by ourselves.

Reading the Bible in community encourages us to look beyond our own narrow horizons. We need to draw on each other's perspectives in our own congregations, and we need to learn from Christians of other times and places. Exposure to diverse readings can help us learn to read scripture against ourselves. Outsiders—strangers, prophets, the poor—can help us to correct our tendency to reduce scripture to our own narrow interests.²⁷ We also need the insights of those who have come before us and whom the Christian traditions have honored as authoritative teachers: Luther and Calvin, to be sure, but also other great teachers who do not belong to the Protestant tradition.²⁸

Memorizing scripture

Understanding scripture as a sacramental word that is meant to be memorized would reshape the way we hear scripture. It would remind us that scripture's language is also ours, a language for prayer and politics, personal meditation and communal formation. In a church without a standard translation, let alone a great one, the memorization of scripture is a problem. Even if we wanted to memorize scripture, which version would we use, and which version would we teach our children?

The memorization of scripture has also become a problem because mainline Protestants have with reason reacted against rote memorization at the cost of understanding what is being memorized. Too often, the memorization of scripture can be a matter of mastering one-liners through which to demonstrate one's orthodoxy.

If scripture is a sacramental, poetic-like word, it is meant to be heard in whole units. Poetic units have an integrity of their own. Even if we focus on one part of a poem, we seek to understand it in the context of the whole. Similarly, scripture is meant to be heard in larger units. When we read scripture in snippets, we treat it as if it were a collection of favorite quotations. We tend to wrench passages out of context. Whether for worship, devotions, study, or for purposes of memorization, we must immerse ourselves in longer units of scripture.²⁹

Hence, memorization of scripture should involve less emphasis on one-liners and more emphasis on whole psalms and chapters. Memorized scripture then becomes a well from which the pastor and the worshiping community draw to lift up their voice to God. In African-American worship, sermons and prayers are saturated with scriptural imagery and allusions. Because scripture is so familiar to the congregation, it comes to constitute its primary language in worship.

Scripture as the language of faith also offers powerful rhetoric for political engagement. In seventeenth century England, Gerrard Winstanley, leader of the Diggers, wrote a series of radical tracts calling for common use of the land and political equality. Though lacking formal theological education, Winstanley knew scripture inside out. Its images shaped his vocabulary to such an extent that his language had a profoundly biblical, prophetic quality.³⁰ One also thinks of the degree to which Abraham Lincoln's addresses and the sermons and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., incorporate and resemble scripture. The memorized word need not be dead; it need not be "pious" (in a depreciating sense of the word). It can be "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12).

The use of scripture in worship

Scripture is a sacramental word. It is meant to be read aloud; it is meant to be read in community; and it is meant to be memorized. These three points suggest, of course, that scripture has its principal locus in worship.³¹ It is in worship that scripture is always read aloud; for many people, worship is the most important—perhaps the only—gathering in community to hear scripture; and, as scripture is incorporated into the liturgy, it becomes a part of our individual and corporate memory. Other spiritual disciplines, such as devotional reading of scripture, grow out of, and help support, this "piety of the word."

Faithful and compelling worship lifts up scripture and its sacramental, poetic quality. It allows a congregation to hear more of scripture, and relates scripture as sacramental word more closely to the eucharist and to preaching. Scripture can inform the language of the entire liturgy. The new Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* suggests rich possibilities for incorporating scripture into worship. Prayers, hymns, declarations, and responses—all become an opportunity to let our own words recede behind those of scripture. Perhaps it is especially important in this day of biblical illiteracy to let scripture have full voice in worship, unstifled by prayers and hymns that seem "more relevant" only because they advance pet social and political agendas.

A rediscovery of the sacramental character of scripture can encourage the reading of more scripture in worship. The common lectionary ensures that a congregation will hear a wide range of scriptural voices over the course of a year. Yet the lectionary has the disadvantage of reducing scripture to snippets. It may be important at times for congregations to learn to hear longer units of scripture in worship, even entire chapters and stories. A *lectio continua* method of preaching (i.e.,

when a preacher works through an entire book of the Bible over the course of several weeks) may provide greater opportunity for reading longer units of scripture in worship.

More frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper may also contribute to a richer appreciation of scripture as a sacramental word. The *Book of Common Worship* includes long eucharistic prayers that rehearse salvation history as recorded in scripture. Scriptural imagery and celebration of the eucharist enrich each other. Understanding scripture as a sacramental word integrally related to the eucharist may very well change our preaching on scripture. The Reformed tradition has tended to emphasize preaching at the expense of eucharistic celebration. As a result, preaching has too often been understood either as an academic lecture or as a dramatic, motivational address. Placing preaching in the context of celebration of the eucharist may help remind us that preaching too is a sacramental act.³² The preacher is called to "improvise" on scripture, to draw out its compelling power, to offer commentary on it. Every performance of scripture in preaching involves a risk. If one stays too close to the text, simply repeating it, the performance becomes too safe and predictable, like an orchestra that plays a musical score accurately but fails to take the risk of interpreting it. But if one strays too far from the text, the performance calls attention to itself, rather than allowing us to be caught up in the reality and presence of Christ.³³

Scripture as God's word to a conflicted church

Worship helps guard the sacramental character of scripture. It undergirds disciplines of reading scripture aloud, in community, and for memorization. It offers us scripture as a gift—a gift that we must approach confidently and humbly. We approach it confidently because scripture sets forth Christ, calls us into discipleship, and gives us a word from God here and now. We must also approach it humbly, aware that scripture is never entirely under our control. The word of God, the two-edged sword of Hebrews, "is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before [God] no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare in the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account" (Heb 4:12–13).

Understanding scripture as a sacramental word will not by itself resolve the issues that divide mainline Protestants. But in a time in which these conflicts threaten the very possibility of scriptural authority (because they seem to demonstrate that one really can get whatever one wants out of the Bible), understanding scripture as a sacramental word may enable us better to say why scripture matters in the first place—why we turn to it, why it has authority, why we revere it.

Viewing scripture as a sacramental word may also help us better to incorporate scripture into our common worship and life. If we confess that scripture sets forth the word of God, we must repent of an all too common temptation to use scripture as an ideological overlay for positions that we have already taken on other grounds. As one scholar has written about Bernard of Clairveaux's sacramental understand-

ing of scripture, “the words that we read are ‘deep in mystery,’ and present us with a mystery that we must struggle to explore—that it is our privilege to explore.”³⁴ Centuries later, we too are challenged to rediscover the compelling power of scripture.

NOTES

1. In their analysis of the Presbyterian predicament, M. Coalter, J. Mulder, and L. Weeks argue that the renewal of the denomination depends on a recovery of theological vision. Key to this agenda is “the urgent need to recover the authority of scripture as the Word of God” (*The Re-forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992]) 282.

2. J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic, 1991) 43–45, 77–86, 120–27.

3. G. A. Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus, and Community,” *This World* (Fall 1988) 21; and idem., *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). Lindbeck identifies three major approaches to scripture—cognitive-propositional, expressive-experiential, and cultural-linguistic (his own)—that correspond roughly to the three described above.

4. E. A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 13, 103.

5. W. C. Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993) 232, 240.

6. Smith explores the relationship between poetry and scripture, arguing that poetry itself has sometimes been understood as “inspired” and therefore scriptural in quality (*What is Scripture?* 228–29).

7. See G. Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 105–25.

8. See S. Hauerwas’s protest against fundamentalism and historical criticism in *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

9. Cf. T. Levenson’s comments about music in “How Not To Make a Stradivarius,” *The American Scholar* (Summer 1994) 377–78.

10. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. A. C. Meisel and M. L. del Mastro (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1975) 85.

11. W. Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe: The Architecture of the Orders* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1971) 110.

12. See R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

13. See G. L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 139–40, as quoted in J. Pelikan, *The Reformation of the Bible/The Bible of the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 28–29.

14. See A. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 12–13, 105–07.

15. For this reason, Calvin’s understanding of scripture is not exhausted by his comments in Book 1 of the *Institutes* but is completed by his comments on the church in Book 4.

16. I. Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh’s Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 54–57.

17. I am thankful to Dean Thompson for bringing this point to my attention.

18. For trenchant observations, see N. Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

19. *Bible for Today's Family: New Testament* (New York: American Bible Society, 1991). Interestingly, a later version of the CEV has replaced "feed box" with "a bed of hay." See Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version (New York: American Bible Society, 1995).

20. As quoted in Pelikan, *Reformation of the Bible*, 43.

21. As quoted in F. Rosenzweig, "Scripture and Luther," in M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. L. Rosenwald with E. Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 49.

22. Personal conversation, June 1995.

23. E. Hirsch, "In the Beginning: A New Translation of the Hebrew Bible Offers a Text for the Ear as Well as the Eye," *Religious Studies News* 11 (February 1996) 1.

24. See S. Ruckert, "Die Welt in sechs Punkten," *Die Zeit* (Hamburg) 14 October 1994 (my translation).

25. See R. R. Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990). For Calvin's emphasis on showing ourselves "teachable toward [God's] minister," see the *Institutes* 4.3.1.

26. See "The Bible: The February 1995 Presbyterian Panel" (Louisville: Presbyterian Church USA, 1995).

27. For a particularly eloquent statement of this point, see S. E. Fowl and L. G. Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 156.

28. See K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.2.3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) 603–20.

29. The practice of reading scripture *in context* suggests a fourth discipline, in addition to the three discussed in this essay.

30. See J. P. Burgess, "Biblical Poet and Prophet: Gerrard Winstanley's Use of Scripture in The Law of Freedom," *JRH* 17 (Winter 1987) 269–82. On this theme in Puritan literature more generally, see J. R. Knott, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

31. As Glen Stassen has pointed out to me, in some traditions, Sunday morning worship is not complete without a time for Bible study in smaller groups either before or after worship. These groups typically provide opportunity for fellowship, prayer, and study, and are sometimes of greater significance to participants than worship itself.

32. The Orthodox theologian A. Schmemmann has argued, "In separation from the word the sacrament is in danger of being perceived as magic, and without the sacrament the word is in danger of being 'reduced' to 'doctrine.'" (*The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* [Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1987] 68). I am also thankful to Ronald Byars for his reflections on the way weekly celebration of the eucharist has redefined his understanding of preaching.

33. Compare Levenson's comments on the performance of music in "How Not to Make a Stradivarius," 377–78.

34. Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 32. I develop the themes of this essay in greater detail in my book, *Why Scripture Matters: Reading the Bible in a Time of Church Conflict* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).



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