

A PARTING OF WAYS

A Comparison of the Hermeneutical Approaches of Bernard Ramm and Grant Osborne

In 1950 a new hermeneutics book written by a young rising evangelical scholar named Bernard Ramm was published in America. The book, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, was the first major conservative evangelical work on hermeneutics since Milton Terry's well known *Biblical Hermeneutics* had appeared in 1885. In the introduction to *Protestant Biblical Interpretation [PBI]*, one seminary professor made the following prediction:

Teachers in Bible institutes and professors in theological seminaries will unite in gratitude to this young man for making available for them a greatly needed textbook. I predict that in the next two years it will be the accepted text for hermeneutical studies in the majority of conservative schools in this country, where men are being trained in that holiest of all work, the interpretation of the Word of God.¹

Subsequent history validated his prediction, and for almost four decades *PBI* served as the standard text for hermeneutics classes in conservative evangelical seminaries in this country. Most contemporary expositors trained at evangelical seminaries before 1975 adopted the principles set forth in *PBI*, and churches fortunate to have such preachers have benefited greatly from their commitment to traditional hermeneutics.

However, in 1970 new winds began to blow in the field of evangelical hermeneutics. Serious questions arose regarding the continued viability of traditional hermeneutics, and most alarmingly, the questions were being raised not by liberals but by respected evangelical scholars. Many of them had become enamored with new ideas

¹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), p. xvii.

surfacing in the social sciences and particularly in the areas of literary criticism and linguistics. Those impacted by these new paradigms wanted to bring traditional hermeneutics in line with the new academic thinking.² One such individual was Grant Osborne, professor at Trinity Evangelical Theological Seminary in Deerfield, Illinois. In 1991 he published *The Hermeneutical Spiral* which he subtitled, “A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation.” Although not openly critical of the traditional approach, Osborne charted a new course, and his book was eagerly received by the evangelical community. The publishers promoted *The Hermeneutical Spiral* [*HSp*] as a book that, “[S]hould prove to be the standard evangelical work in the field for years to come.”³ Ramm’s forty year run was clearly over. By the end of the decade, books like *HSp* had won the day and some evangelicals were advancing them as necessary replacements for Ramm’s *PBI*.

Supplanting Ramm is necessary and not a matter of change for change’s sake, for the philosophical climate and interpretive methods of the late twentieth century absolutely require a new text. As for the philosophical climate, interpreters today are keenly aware of the difficulty of objectivity (as thorny an issue for unbelievers as for believers).⁴

So, the rudder was set for a new course and evangelical scholars began training the next generation of expositors in the methodology of the new hermeneutic. But, was

² A good summary of what happened to hermeneutics in the 1970’s can be found in the first chapter of Robert Thomas’ recent work on hermeneutics. Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), pp. 13-37.

³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 1991), dust cover. This publisher’s prediction, though self-serving, proved accurate. The most recent edition contains this endorsement from Ted Dorman taken from his review of *HSp* in *JETS* 36:3 (September 1993) p. 409: “Hermeneutical Spiral is the best introduction to the practice of Biblical interpretation to come along in years, perhaps ever.” *HSp* also received favorable reviews in *Bibliotheca Sacra* and initially in *The Master’s Seminary Journal*.

⁴ *EmJ* 2:2 (Win 93) p. 214. This citation is in a review by Dale Walker of a later work on hermeneutics, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard.

this shift wise? Did it produce better expositors who, by practicing the new hermeneutic, were able to come to a more accurate understanding of the biblical text? In what ways did Osborne differ or depart from Ramm, and more importantly, what if any significance did these differences have in light of Evangelicalism's stated commitment to a high view of Scripture? Any responsible attempt to answer these questions must begin by comparing representative works from both approaches to hermeneutics. Key differences between the two methods revealed by the comparative analysis must be identified, and concerns that surface must be evaluated and addressed. For the purpose of this analysis, Ramm's *PBI* will represent traditional hermeneutics and Osborne's *HSp* will represent the new hermeneutic.

A General Comparative Analysis⁵

Ramm, and Milton Terry before him, set specific parameters for traditional hermeneutics by providing a clear set of rules and principles by which the biblical text should be properly interpreted. These principles were foundationally grounded on a high view of Scripture, and based on a commitment to a particular set of common beliefs about biblical truth. Practitioners of traditional hermeneutics believed the Bible was inspired and infallible. They also believed that Biblical truth was absolute, objective, authoritative, and discernable to the contemporary interpreter by use of a defined set of interpretative principles.⁶ Furthermore, traditional hermeneutics demanded a commitment to authorial intent and the single meaning of the text, and treated application

⁵ A helpful overview of the "hermeneutical landscape" comparing the traditional and post-1970 approaches to hermeneutics can be found in the first chapter of Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, pp. 13-37.

⁶ Ramm has an entire section dedicated to inspiration in his chapter explaining the Protestant system of hermeneutics. The opening line of that chapter is as follows: "The divine inspiration of the Bible is the foundation of historic Protestant hermeneutics and exegesis." *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 93.

separately from the hermeneutical process rather than as a primary part of the interpretive process itself. Exegetes commonly described traditional hermeneutics as the literal, historical, and grammatical approach to biblical interpretation. These values are clearly identified in *PBI*. Ramm devotes considerable space to defining hermeneutics, reviewing the history of biblical interpretation throughout two millennia of church history, establishing a commitment to inspiration, and setting forth a clear and defined set of interpretative principles. Interestingly, although Osborne holds a high view of Scripture as a conservative evangelical, and as a scholar is certainly aware of the long history of biblical interpretation, he devotes almost no space in *HSp* to either topic but rather plunges directly into a discussion of interpretative methodology. Nor does he include a set of clearly defined principles early on in his work although they are mentioned in later sections of *HSp*.⁷ In contrast, Ramm and traditional hermeneutics believed the authority of Scripture was the most significant reason proper interpretation was important; therefore, for them the primary task of hermeneutics was discovering what God had said in the text.⁸ To be sure, that message once identified, would have to be applied in legitimate and appropriate ways to the modern audience, but Ramm considered this a task separate and distinct from hermeneutics. In the traditional approach, the primary voice and perspective was that of the Author as He spoke through the inspired human author whose words were preserved in the biblical text. The task of the exegete demanded he intentionally set aside all other voices, especially his own, in the attempt to discover the voice of God in the text by employing a specific set of well defined interpretive

⁷ Osborne devotes little more than a passing reference to inspiration (p. 8) and does not really address the specific principles of interpretation in one place but unfolds them as he discusses the methodology he is advocating in each section of the book.

⁸ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 2.

principles based on the literal, historical, and grammatical interpretation of a particular biblical text.

This is the primary and basic need of hermeneutics: *to ascertain what God has said in the Sacred Scriptures; to determine the meaning of the Word of God.* There is no profit to us if God has spoken and we do not know what He has said. Therefore it is our responsibility to determine the meaning of what God has given us in Sacred Scripture. . . Upon the correct interpretation of the Bible rests our doctrine of salvation, of sanctification, of eschatology, and of Christian living. It is our solemn responsibility to know what God has said with reference to each of these. This can be done only if we have carefully, thoroughly, and systematically formulated that system of Biblical interpretation which will yield most readily the native meaning of the Bible. Furthermore, we need to know the correct method of Biblical interpretation so that we do not confuse the voice of God with the voice of man. In every one of those places where our interpretation is at fault, we have made substitution of the voice of man for the voice of God.⁹

Consequently, traditional hermeneutics advanced a specific set of principles designed to get the interpreter back to the original meaning of the text as intended by the author and set forth in a context that was to be understood historically, grammatically, and normatively/literally. The single meaning of Scripture was an important foundational principle in traditional hermeneutics. The single meaning of a Biblical text was discoverable by the use of these principles in spite of the interpreter's innate inability to fully penetrate the psyche or thinking of the original author. This limitation, while acknowledged, was in fact of minimal consequence since the primary issue was not understanding the mind, psyche, or even world-view of the author but rather understanding the meaning of his propositional statements preserved in the biblical text. By using the legitimate laws of language and interpretation, the objective meaning of his statements could be discovered.

These standard commitments affected the way evangelicals taught hermeneutics. Texts on hermeneutics, of which *PBI* is a good example, dealt predominantly with textual

⁹Ibid., p. 2.

and grammatical issues. While genre was important, it was given a much simpler treatment. Different genres such as narrative, epistolary, prophecy, poetry, and a section on types were discussed but only in general terms. Although application was distinct from the hermeneutical process, it was a recognized use to which the end product (the exegesis) should be directed, and so proper principles for its use were discussed albeit in a limited way. However, the exegetical task focused predominately on the text and the context. Understanding the author and his world were helpful and necessary but subordinate to the task of discovering the objective meaning of the text and its biblical context. Very little linguistics or social science entered into the process.

By the early 1970's, new thinking emerged affecting the hermeneutical landscape in disturbing ways.¹⁰ Driving this new approach were two fundamental shifts away from traditional hermeneutics. The first was a dismissal of the concept that truth was objective, authoritative, and independent from the interpreter. The second was the introduction of the concept that the interpreter's "pre-understanding" should be a primary component of the hermeneutical process. In addition to these two primary shifts, several other trends emerged that ultimately resulted in the formulation of a new and different approach to the hermeneutical process. First, advances in the fields of social sciences and linguistics were brought to bear on the interpretative process. Those influenced by these new advances believed that an objective understanding of the original meaning of the text as intended by the author was technically impossible. They contended that the exegete

¹⁰ This timeframe is chosen for the rise of the new hermeneutic simply because by 1980, this thinking had solidified sufficiently to be defined and articulated in Anthony C. Thiselton's ground-breaking work entitled, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein*. Thiselton's work led to a radical departure from traditional hermeneutics and was an attempt to reconcile the theologies espoused by Heidegger and Bultmann into a new form of hermeneutics in which human bias played a much greater role than propositional truth. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 18.

came to the text with a fundamental inability to arrive at the objective meaning due to his own pre-understandings which colored his interpretation and limited his ability to understand its full meaning since that meaning was comprised of both the words and the psyche of the original author. Second, significant developments in linguistics and literary criticism necessitated new ways of looking at genres and arriving at meaning. The traditional genre categories were subdivided and expanded considerably. New principles were formulated to interpret the new or adjusted genres. This trend can be seen by comparing the amount of information and the genre categories listed in Ramm and the significantly expanded sections included by Osborne. Ramm delineated three broad categories of biblical genre and discussed them in approximately five pages. He also included brief sections on prophecy, types, and parables.¹¹ Osborne, on the other hand, devoted an entire section in excess of one hundred pages to the treatment of the following seven genres: narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, apocalyptic, parable, and epistle.¹² Finally, the new hermeneutic attempted to weave an interpretation tapestry consisting of three horizons: that of the author/original audience, that of the interpreter, and eventually that of the modern receptors. This was in stark contrast to the approach of traditional hermeneutics which intentionally set out to interpret one horizon – the authorial meaning of the text.

Comparing traditional hermeneutics as represented by Ramm with the new hermeneutic represented here by Osborne, reveals a widening gulf between the traditional and the new approaches. Osborne included much that is helpful in dealing with the new literary developments in biblical studies, but at the end of the day, he obviously imbibed

¹¹Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp.142-148.

¹² Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, pp. 149-260.

much of the new thinking, and consequently his approach reflects a departure from rather than a development of traditional hermeneutics. To this significant departure we now turn.

Major Differences Contrasted

An objective comparison of both approaches reveals significant differences of which the following are crucial, because in addition to setting the two systems apart from each other, these differences have significant implications for how exegetes move from the hermeneutical to the homiletical task. At the end of the day, these differences blur the distinction between hermeneutics and homiletics found in traditional hermeneutics. The first and most obvious set of differences between the two approaches is the different use of standard hermeneutical terminology.

Differences in the Usage of Terminology

Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Traditional hermeneutics as Ramm understood it was distinct from exegesis. In this approach, hermeneutics was the set of principles used to do exegesis. In other words, exegesis was the product of employing hermeneutics. He impressed this distinction upon the reader by means of an unforgettable metaphor.

As a theological discipline hermeneutics is the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible. It is a special application of the general science of linguistics and meaning. It seeks to formulate those particular rules which pertain to the special factors connected with the Bible. It stands in the same relationship to exegesis that a rule-book stands to a game. The rule book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. The rules are not the game, and the game is meaningless without the

rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.¹³

In sharp contrast to the traditional approach, the new hermeneutic incorporated exegesis into the hermeneutical process rather than keeping it separate. In essence, the distinction between Ramm's "rules of the game" and the "game itself" for all practical purposes was blurred or in some cases completely eradicated. Osborne understanding of "hermeneutics" clearly included more than just the principles by which exegesis was done. He advocated an expanded use of "hermeneutics" in which both application and exegesis comprise the hermeneutical process as seen in the following paragraph:

The hermeneutical enterprise also has three levels. . . We begin with a third-person approach, asking "what it meant" (exegesis), then passing to a first-person approach, querying "what it means for me" (devotional) and finally taking a second-person approach, seeking "how to share with *you* what it means to me" (sermonic). These levels are interdependent rather than exclusive. Evangelical hermeneutics has consistently centered upon the first, leaving the others to homileticians . . . In actuality all three are essential to a wholistic methodology . . . The sacred author's intended meaning is the critical starting-point but not an end itself. The task of hermeneutics must begin with exegesis but is not complete until one notes the contextualization of that meaning for today.¹⁴

Meaning and Interpretation and Application

Traditional hermeneutics defined meaning as "the truth intention of the author" and interpretation as "the understanding of the truth intention of the author."¹⁵ Ramm did not necessarily draw such a fine distinction between meaning and interpretation. In fact, sometimes Ramm uses the terms interchangeably. But, as the paragraph below reveals, Ramm did delineate a clear difference between meaning and application.

[H]ere we must remember the old adage: "Interpretation is one, application is many." This means that there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study. But a given text or a given passage may

¹³ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

“speak to a number of problems or issues . . . [T]he preacher must always distinguish the initial primary meaning of the text from the particular application he makes with it.”¹⁶

Osborne and those advocating the new hermeneutic made no such distinction. Not only did they include exegesis and application as primary components of the hermeneutical task, they blurred the process even further by differentiating between meaning and interpretation in ways that Ramm did not. Meaning for Osborne entailed the original meaning of the text (what Ramm referred to as interpretation in the quote above). However, he followed E. D. Hirsch in adding the term “significance” to the hermeneutical equation and defined it as “the multiform significance or implications of a text for individual readers, an application of the original meaning that varies depending upon the diverse circumstances.”¹⁷ In a later chapter not only did Osborne further differentiate between meaning and interpretation (something not done to this degree by traditional hermeneutics), he included homiletical contextualization as part of the hermeneutical process, and in so doing further eroded the separation between hermeneutics and homiletics maintained in traditional hermeneutics.

The hermeneutical task has three levels: meaning—considering the intended message of the text; interpretation—asking to what extent its message is determinative for our own day; and contextualization—seeking the form that will best communicate that normative message and lead to concrete application to people’s daily lives.¹⁸

In short, advocates of the new hermeneutic blurred the hermeneutical landscape by assigning new meanings to the traditional terms without clearly indicating they had

¹⁶ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 113. It should be noted that some practitioners of traditional hermeneutics distinguish interpretation from meaning and define meaning as the truth intention of the original author and interpretation as an understanding of authorial intention. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

done so. As a result, confusion reigned among the exegetes reading the books advocating and explaining the new hermeneutic. Because the traditional terms were used without qualification to advance the new hermeneutic, many evangelical practitioners failed to see that the new path had in fact radically departed from the old.¹⁹

Differences in the Role of Application

As seen above, Ramm and those committed to traditional hermeneutics drew a clear and fast distinction between hermeneutics and application. Only after the hermeneutical process was complete should the exegete turn to the task of applying the meaning of the text to his contemporary audience. Traditional hermeneutics urged exegetes to come to the text apart from any pre-understandings in order to discover the objective truth placed there by the original author. From this objective truth expressed in the single meaning derived from the inspired biblical text, the exegete could then make multiple legitimate applications of that truth to a contemporary audience. Exegesis as a part of the hermeneutical process was distinct from application. However, Osborne and those following the new hermeneutic tended to include (to varying degrees) application in the exegetical process and therefore considered it a necessary component of proper hermeneutics.

As we move from the world of the text to its significance, we must wed those two aspects. We cannot finally separate exegesis from application, meaning from significance, because they are two aspects of the same hermeneutical act. To derive the “meaning” of a text is already to arrive at its significance, because the horizon of your pre-understanding has united with the horizon of the text, and exposition has become the beginning of significance.²⁰

¹⁹ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 27.

²⁰ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 318.

This “wedding” of application to hermeneutics was a clear and bold departure from the distinction maintained traditional hermeneutics. By wedding application to hermeneutics, not only did Osborne depart from Ramm, he merged hermeneutics and homiletics and introduced the “homiletician” as an inappropriate participant in the hermeneutical process.

The preacher’s task is to insure that the Word speaks as clearly today as it did in ancient times. This does not occur easily and is often shallowly done. Even those who exercise great exegetical care in elucidating the original meaning of the text often fail on this point. For the most part this is because homileticians have failed to provide a strong hermeneutical foundation for application. When I began teaching a course on interpretation about ten years ago I looked in vain for a preaching text that discussed application from a hermeneutical standpoint.²¹

The reason for the lack of such books is that prior to the introduction the new hermeneutic, all existing hermeneutical texts kept application separate from the hermeneutical process.

Brian Shealy, contributing author in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, notes that although including application as a part of the hermeneutical process may seem sensible and practical, in actuality it is a departure that brings great danger to biblical truth.

The new hermeneutic arises out of existential interpretation that primarily is concerned with questions of human existence. Thus, it finds its starting point in human beings. The result of trying to understand a text in relation to how it applies to people is that truth is easily relativized.²²

Differences in General and Special Hermeneutics

Traditionally hermeneutics consisted of two distinct categories: general and special hermeneutics. General hermeneutics referred to a set of common interpretative principles used to interpret the Bible as a whole, whereas special hermeneutics referred to

²¹ Ibid., p. 318.

²² Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 176.

a particular set of principles unique to specific genres or categories within the biblical literature. *PBI* began with a detailed discussion of the necessary principles for general hermeneutics. Furthermore, in this discussion Ramm addressed the importance of the spiritual life and character of the exegete as well as the necessity of holding a high view of Scripture. Additionally, proper hermeneutics demanded skillful use of the biblical languages. Where Ramm and others did discuss special hermeneutics, they often re-emphasized use of the basic principles for general hermeneutics but applied them with certain adjustments and considerations when dealing with biblical prophecy, biblical typology, and biblical poetry.

In stark contrast, Osborne and the new hermeneutic had surprisingly little to say about general hermeneutics and focused almost immediately on issues and methodologies of special hermeneutics. Furthermore, any emphasis on the spiritual pre-requisites expected of the exegete is conspicuously absent from their works, and inspiration and inerrancy, if mentioned at all, receive little more than a passing comment. Whereas traditional hermeneutics demanded an expertise in the biblical languages, the new hermeneutic emphasizes expertise in linguistics, social sciences, literary criticism, and post-structural/post-modern ideologies. This shift has significantly reshaped the hermeneutical process. The strong emphasis on literary criticism has almost completely eliminated any significant discussion of general hermeneutics, has resulted in the reclassification of traditional special hermeneutics as the whole of modern hermeneutics. The traditional emphasis on a literal, historical, grammatical interpretation has been overshadowed by discussions about different literary criticism and genre structure (often seemingly accompanied by a growing openness to the influences of higher criticism).

Familiarity with biblical Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic has given way to knowledge of the latest linguistic theory advanced in many cases by outright unbelievers, and formulated in fields totally unrelated to religion or the Scriptures. The place of this “new knowledge” has been secured under the rubric that “all truth is God’s truth” and by an inexcusable failure on the part of evangelical scholars to preserve the priority of the authority of special revelation over general revelation.²³ At the end of the day, the new hermeneutic bears little similarity to traditional hermeneutics. In addition to changing the terminology and introducing homiletics into the hermeneutical process, the new hermeneutic has virtually eliminated any meaningful discussion of general hermeneutics in favor of an expanded and secularized special hermeneutics.

KEY CONCERNS AND CONCLUSIONS

Ramm understood the hermeneutical task to be limited to one horizon. The exegete attempted to set aside his preconceptions and came to the text as objectively as possible to discover the single meaning intended by the biblical author. This was accomplished by properly applying a defined set of principles to uncover the literal, historical, and grammatical meaning of that text. Only after completing the hermeneutical process should the expositor begin the homiletical task of applying the text to the contemporary audience. There were several additional points where the new hermeneutic departed radically from the old. Perhaps the most alarming departure was the new role assigned to the exegete himself as a part of the hermeneutical process. In the traditional approach, the exegete was involved, but he intentionally brought as much

²³For a good discussion on this topic as well as rebuttal of this argument, see chapter five in Thomas’ *Evangelical Hermeneutics*.

objectivity to the process as possible. In other words, the exegete attempted to come as an outside observer seeking to identify what someone else, the original author, had placed in the text. However, the new hermeneutic argued that such objectivity was not only impossible, it was undesirable. In his attempt to discover the meaning of the text, the interpreter intentionally engaged his pre-understandings and presuppositions in the hermeneutical/exegetical process itself. Although traditional hermeneutics acknowledged the existence of presuppositions and pre-understandings in the exegete, these presuppositions were considered to be obstacles that the exegete must minimize or remove from the hermeneutical process. In other words, the exegete was to strive for as much objectivity as possible in the process.²⁴ Although Osborne reflects a more conservative approach than others who include pre-understanding in the interpretive process, the fact that he included it at all was a significant departure from traditional hermeneutics. He replaced the traditional “one horizon” model of hermeneutics with a spiral model consisting of three primary horizons: the horizon and world of the biblical writer, the horizon and pre-understanding of the interpreter, and the horizon or world of the contemporary audience and its need for application. As the interpreter comes to the text these additional horizons interact with each other shaping and refining meaning so the concerns and truth claims of each shape the end product—meaning. In this model, the interpretive cycle never quite closes but remains open due to the impossibility of absolute certainty on the part of the interpreter because of his inability to fully penetrate the mind and pre-understanding of either the original author, the contemporary audience, or even his own thinking. This has serious implications for conservative Evangelicals

²⁴ Ramm has an interesting section on this very point where he argues that the interpreter should strive for objective exegesis rather than subjective eisegesis. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 114-118.

who claim to hold a high view of Scripture. If Scripture is inspired and authoritative for all matters of faith and practice, then objective understanding is crucial to doctrines such as the virgin birth, vicarious atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ, hamartiology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. If one can't be absolutely sure of the objective truth claims made in regard to these doctrines by the original biblical authors, then it becomes impossible to determine what constitutes the objective and sure Faith once delivered by the Apostles; nor can such faith be absolutely authoritative for the faith and practice of the Church. Traditional hermeneutics was based on the conviction that discovering the objective meaning of the biblical text was not only possible, it was crucial and therefore, its discovery was of primary importance. Traditional hermeneutics viewed truth revealed by special revelation as having greater weight and authority than truth found in general revelation although both might be equally true and accurate. However, in recent days, general revelation and knowledge gained from the sciences has been granted equal standing with the special revelation of Scripture. This unfortunate elevation has robbed the exegete of certainty and objectivity in the interpretive process, and has made him the final determiner of the meaning of any propositional communication including the biblical text. Tragically, evangelical scholars like Osborne have been seduced by this new thinking into shaping a new paradigm for biblical hermeneutics that is neither biblical nor hermeneutics in any genuine sense. In trying to improve and update the traditional path, many evangelical scholars have departed from the path entirely and set out on a slippery slope that ends with no means of arriving at a truly objective and authoritative biblical interpretation suitable for faith and practice. Subsequently, those

who sit under preaching derived from the new hermeneutic are more apt to be misguided by the voice of Man than guided by the voice of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Major Works Cited

Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991.

Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1970.

Thomas, Robert L. *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002.