

Horizons and Preunderstandings

- Our horizon
- Definitions
- Role of preunderstandings
- Theological preunderstandings

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Our Horizon

“Don’t bother me...I’m looking for a verse of Scripture to back up one of my preconceived notions!”



2

Our Horizon

- Describe your horizon...

Our limited perspective leads us to bring a set of preunderstandings to Scripture.



3

Definitions

- Preunderstanding = “A body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception and interpretation of reality or any aspect of it” (D. S. Ferguson, in Klein 99).

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Definitions

- Are preunderstandings good or bad?

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Definitions

- Four types of preunderstandings:
 - Informational (knowledge)
 - Attitudinal (disposition, bias)
 - Ideological (world view, perspective)
 - Methodological (procedure)
- D. S. Ferguson, cited in Klein 100

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Role of Preunderstandings

- What role do preunderstandings play in biblical interpretation?
 - They're where we start from.
 - They let us learn new things.
 - They influence where our interpretations go.

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Role of Preunderstandings

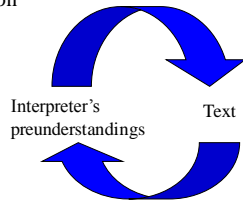
- Some people argue that we should come to Scripture *without* preunderstandings.
 - Bernard Lonergan: “the principle of the empty head.”
 - This is impossible.
 - This is dangerous.

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Role of Preunderstandings

- How can we deal with our preunderstandings?
 - Become as aware of them as we can.
 - Be willing to let them be reshaped in the process of interpretation

Hermeneutical
circle



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Role of Preunderstandings

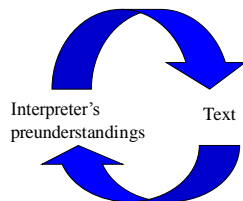
- We can ask questions of the text.
 - We should also let the text ask questions of us.
 - Be open to the convicting and illuminating ministry of the Spirit.

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Role of Preunderstandings

- Every time we change through reading Scripture, we show that the hermeneutical process isn't a vicious circle but a spiral.

Hermeneutical
spiral



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Written Summary

- Describe your own formational hermeneutic.
 - What is Scripture?
 - How is it authoritative, and how does that authority play out in our encounter with it?
 - What does it mean to engage with Scripture ethically/responsibly?
 - How should we approach Scripture (preunderstandings, method) in order to fully realize its power to nurture wisdom and transformation?

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Formal Paper

- Apply your formational hermeneutic to ministry.
 - How does the Bible speak to this situation?
 - How will it form/inform your approach to the situation?
 - How may it foster transformation?
 - Be sure to integrate research and reflection, theory and practice; refer to your written summary as needed.

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Theological Preunderstandings

- Read handout 3.1 (“Theological Starting Points and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings”).
- What traditions are represented on the following slides?

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The sovereignty of God is clearly emphasized in Scripture. He is represented as the Creator, and His will as the cause of all things.... God...marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny, and uses them for His purposes. And though He endows them with freedom, yet His will controls their actions. . . . It is said that if the decretive will of God also determined the entrance of sin into the world, God thereby becomes the author of sin and really wills something that is contrary to His moral perfection. . . . _____ theologians...frankly admit that they cannot solve the difficulty.... The...origin and nature of the religious life of man...was rooted in a covenant, just as the Christian life is to-day, and that covenant is variously known as the covenant of nature, the covenant of life, the Edenic covenant, and the covenant of works.

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The _____ vision...is one that discovers God in and through the things of this world.... Because of _____’s belief that God’s saving presence is mediated through the ordinary, the material, the human, _____ can place great emphasis not only on the book of the church, the Bible (the Word of God in words of women and men) but also on the church itself as a sacramental reality, visible and invisible, both human and divine.... From the understanding of the sacramental nature of the church it is a small but logical step for _____ to understand that the church’s tradition, particularly as articulated in the...ministry of teaching... must be taken with utmost seriousness both as a source and a judge of theology....

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The Bible gives specific guidelines for the shape of discipleship, for the form of the church and for the relationship of the church to the world. The basic models of the believer’s relationship to Christ (discipleship) and of the church as the binding and loosing community are to be found in Scripture and are to be followed and obeyed because they represent the mind of Christ. . . . Jesus stood at the center. He was a hinge, a watershed. Before him had been one kind of historical reality; after him, another kind. Before Jesus everything was in the nature of promise of things to come; in Jesus everything was fulfillment. The Old Testament was a shadow; in Jesus came the true reality.

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[The] Scriptures, and subsequently the confessions, are normative for _____ theology in the application not of abstract and disconnected doctrinal truths, but of the Gospel. The Gospel, the teaching that God accepts the sinner as righteous for Christ’s sake, provides organic unity to both the Scriptures and the confessions.... The Gospel...becomes the theological standard for judging doctrine. In actual practice a contradiction between these two principles of Scripture and Gospel is rare, but it may happen. _____’s rejection of Hebrews, James, and Revelation from the New Testament canon was an application of this principle.... The law has no independent, autonomous existence in revelation, but is given for the very purpose of God’s justifying the sinner for Christ’s sake.

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