

Concordia Seminary: Lectures for Exegetical Day

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Biblical Megatrends: A History of Biblical Interpretation and the Communication Cultures of Western Civilization

The purpose of this lecture will be to survey the correlations between the formation of the paradigms of biblical interpretation and the major changes in communication technology and culture over the past three millennia. The basic conclusion is that the religion of Israel and its Christian descendant has formed new systems of biblical exegesis and interpretation for each new dominant communication technology and culture: the cultures of orality, manuscript, print, and document.

We live in the period of the greatest change in communication technology and cultural formation since the development of writing and literate culture. The challenge facing the Church now is to form a new paradigm for the exegesis and interpretation of the Bible in and for digital culture. A first step is to recognize and identify our captivity to the interpretive and institutional systems we formed for the communication of the Gospel in the document culture of the Enlightenment. We need a new reformation grounded in a new exegetical and hermeneutical methodology.

The Difference Hearing Makes: the Exegesis and Interpretation of the Bible as Performance Literature

The purpose of this lecture is to outline a new exegetical and hermeneutical methodology for the Bible in digital culture. Our present exegetical system is based on the anachronistic assumption that the Bible was a library of silent texts read by readers. Historical study of the communication culture of the ancient world reveals that the Bible is more accurately conceived as a series of compositions of sound that were performed for audiences from memory.

An exegetical exploration of Mark's resurrection story will be a case study for the reconception of Mark as performance literature. Steps will be: (1) sound mapping the story, (2) learning the story by heart, (3) listening to the story in English and in Greek, and (4) identifying the impact of the story for its original audiences. A performance criticism exegesis of the story reveals that the ending at 16:8 is in direct continuity with other earlier endings. Its impact was to invite the listeners to confront their fears of telling the stories of Jesus. The empowerment of a network of storytellers was the communal strategy implicit in the storytelling performance of Mark.

The hermeneutics of the multimedia translation of Mark's story of the Gerasene demoniac, "Out of the Tombs," is a test case for the identification of a digital hermeneutic. The Network of Biblical Storytellers International is an example of a non-hierarchical institutional structure for the Bible in digital culture. You are all invited to the NBS Festival Gathering and to become biblical storytellers. A recommendation is to learn as many stories of the Gospels by heart as you can while you are in seminary.

The Messiah of Peace: the Exegesis of Mark's Story as Addressed to Israelite/Gentile Audiences in the Aftermath of the Judean-Roman War

The purpose of this lecture will be to summarize the meaning and impact of Mark's climactic story of Jesus' passion and resurrection when studied as a story told to ancient Israelite/Gentile audiences in the aftermath of the Judean-Roman war. The first step is to identify Mark's audiences by a systematic analysis of audience address in the Gospel. The conclusion is that Mark's story was addressed to audiences of predominantly Judean persons but included a minority of Gentile persons all of whom are addressed as persons who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

A second step is to identify the rhetorical structures of the story. The predominant rhetorical appeal of Mark's story can be best named as a rhetoric of implication rather than a rhetoric of condemnation. The conclusion is that Mark's story was an appeal to recognize "our" implication in the death of the Messiah implicit in the choice of Barabbas rather than Jesus and the national pursuit of war against their enemies, the Gentiles. The story's meaning is the opposite of what has been read as "anti-Jewish polemic." It was instead a passionate plea for the pursuit of peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in the aftermath of the war by storytelling. Jesus died for all those involved in his death: disciples, Judeans, and Gentiles. Mark's appeal at the end of the Gospel was to go and tell the story of Jesus, the Messiah.

The implication of the original meaning of Mark's passion-resurrection story for exegetical theology is that we need to develop a theology of peace and peacemaking between religious and ethnic enemies. The development of a theology of peace will begin with our recognition of the implication of our traditions in the structures of hatred and violence in the history of the ongoing conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics and between Christians and Jews. It will include an exposition of the theological contradiction between a theology of "just war" and the stories of Jesus as the non-violent Messiah of peace in the Gospels. This theology will include a constructive exploration of the models of peacemaking and reconciliation between enemies that are implicit in the Gospel stories, specifically the centrality of doing good for our enemies.