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# The Use of Analogy in Biblical Studies

**What did the authors of the New Testament think they were doing when they quoted the Old Testament? And how can we today best interpret the New Testament use of Old Testament texts? Steve Moyise surveys some of the models used for understanding this complex area, and offers some stimulating conclusions.**

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, I was at a conference discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer. There were many learned presentations but the only one that I remember is the speaker who offered two illustrations or analogies. He said that some people see the work of the Holy Spirit like the oars of a rowing boat. They allow us to move forward but it takes real effort on our part. And when it comes to the Bible, such people point to all the action words used by Jesus and Paul (seek, strive, obey, submit). On the other hand, others see the Christian life more on the analogy of a sailing boat, where one hoists the sail and catches the wind (the analogy is helped by the fact that Greek *pneuma* and Hebrew *ruach* can mean wind or spirit). Here the emphasis is not on human effort but being carried along by a greater power and they point to verses like Ephesians 5:18 ('be filled with the Spirit') and Galatians 2:20 ('it is no longer I who live'). As all good preachers know, a good story or illustration endures far longer than the actual arguments that are used.

This has been brought home to me recently by a dialogue I have been having with Greg Beale in recent editions of the *Irish Biblical Studies*.<sup>1</sup> Beale criticized my work on the book of Revelation by offering the analogy that the use of the Old Testament in the New is rather like taking an apple from a tree and placing it in a bowl of decorative fruit. In my 1995 monograph<sup>2</sup> (and also in my 1994 article in this journal)<sup>3</sup>, I made the point that allusions and quotations are always out of context *to some degree* because they have been loosed from their original linguistic

1 See S. Moyise, 'The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale', *IBS* 21 (1999), pp 54-58 and G. Beale, 'Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise', *IBS* 21 (1999), pp 151-80.

2 S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNT Sup 115, Sheffield Academic Press 1995, reviewed in *Anvil* 14 (1997), p 63.

3 S. Moyise, 'Does the New Testament Quote the Old Testament Out of Context?', *Anvil* 11 (1994), pp 133-43.

and cultural moorings. Though it is true that they often evoke something of the old context, their meaning is now largely determined by the role and function they have in their new context. On the bowl of fruit analogy, Beale points out that while it is true that the apple now occupies a different function and hence significance in its new setting, it never loses its identity as an apple deriving from a particular class of tree. He then argues that while Old Testament texts may gain new *significance* in their new settings, this never involves a change of *meaning*. The apple may look different in the decorative bowl of fruit but it remains an apple.

My reply to this sprang from studies in the book of Revelation which suggested that some Old Testament texts certainly do take on new meanings, and so I questioned the appropriateness of the analogy. In short, I argued that texts are *not* like apples that have been placed in a decorative bowl of fruit, with solid boundaries to protect them from interacting with other fruit. If anything, they are more like a fruit salad, where the pieces of fruit retain *traces* of their original setting but one is now more impressed with the differences. They have been used to construct something new (consider the use of Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah to describe Jesus in Rev 1:12-16). However, this exchange suggested to me a fruitful (!) avenue of research, namely, an investigation into the dominant analogies that govern biblical studies. And since my field of study is the use of the Old Testament in the New, that is the place where I will begin.

### Promise and Fulfilment

Perhaps the most enduring of the analogies is that of promise and fulfilment. Indeed, it has been so significant that some would question whether it is an analogy at all. The combination of Matthew's formula quotations, Luke's Nazareth sermon where Jesus says, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing', together with the summary statements in Luke 24 that Jesus showed how the law, prophets and psalms all spoke of him, would seem to confirm it for these two Gospels. John uses *pleroun* (fulfil) for Judas's betrayal, the world's hatred towards Jesus, casting lots for his clothes and the lack of broken bones during the crucifixion. It occurs in the speeches of Acts 3 and 13. Thus for many, promise and fulfilment is not an analogy of the use of the Old Testament in the New but a statement of fact. The New Testament authors primarily thought in terms of promise and fulfilment when they quoted or alluded to Scripture.

However, despite the long pedigree of this approach, the rise of historical criticism has challenged whether many of the texts cited in the New Testament can reasonably be described as 'promise'. For example, while the texts from Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2 contain future verbs, the other quotations in Matthew's infancy stories, namely, Hosea 11:1 and Jeremaih 31:15 do not. By any reasonable use of language, these texts do not appear as promises waiting to be fulfilled. Furthermore, Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2 can only be quoted as promises fulfilled by easing them from their contextual moorings and tampering with their language. Isaiah 7:14, as is well known, is quoted according to a Greek translation which uses *parthenos* ('virgin') for the Hebrew *alma* ('young woman', as in NRSV). And Micah 5:2 has the word *oudamos* ('by no means') inserted after 'land of Judah', effectively

reversing its meaning (compare the quoted version in Matthew 2:6 with Micah 5:2). Thus Grollenberg says: 'the first Christians were not concerned with what the authors of the ancient text had wanted to say. That is something that we moderns ask about. They inferred the meaning of the ancient text from the events brought about by God in which they themselves were involved.'<sup>4</sup>

### The Veil Lifted

This has led to the view that the New Testament authors were not trying to say what the text used to mean before the advent of Christ. What would be the point of that? Rather, they were trying to interpret the ancient texts given what they now know and what they have now experienced. The impetus for such a position undoubtedly came from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, where numerous texts are read in the light of the history and key personnel of the Qumran community. The biblical justification is best seen in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15, where Paul uses the image of the veil: 'Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses' is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.'

The purpose of the veil in the original story (Exodus 34) was to prevent the people seeing Moses' glowing face. It was not simply 'sunblock' to dull the image but a 'covering' to hide Moses' face. And when Paul switches to discussing the reading of Moses, he says that that same veil lies over their minds. In other words, they cannot see what is there until they turn to the Lord and the veil is taken away. As an analogy for the use of the Old Testament in the New, the emphasis is clearly on discontinuity. The New Testament authors are able to offer new meanings to old texts because they are no longer hampered by the veil that blocks their sight. It is no longer a question of whether the New Testament authors respect the original meaning of the old texts. They believe that they are giving the true meaning of these texts *for the first time*. This would also appear to be the view of the Habakkuk commentator at Qumran, who says: 'and God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him 'the fulness of that time' (as Brownlee translates, or 'when time would come to an end', as Vermes puts it). And as for that which He said, That he who reads may read it speedily: interpreted this concerns the teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the prophets' (1QpHab 7:1-5).

### Written for our Instruction

Romans 15:4 appears to offer a third alternative to 'promise and fulfilment' and 'veil lifted'. Paul has just cited Psalm 69:9 and then says: 'For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.' And 1 Corinthians 9:8 bears this out. Paul cites the very 'un-promise' like legal text that 'you shall not muzzle

<sup>4</sup> L. Grollenberg, *Unexpected Messiah*, SCM, London 1988, p 7.

an ox while it is treading out the grain' (Deuteronomy 25:4) and then asks rhetorically, 'Is it for oxen that God is concerned?' His conclusion is that this text was written for our sake and hence speaks directly to the issue of the payment of those who work in Christ's service. He is not necessarily suggesting that no one has previously been able to understand this verse. Paul knows very well that its literal agricultural sense has been in force for centuries. But the reason that it was written down, says Paul, was for our instruction. Paul, writing in the age of fulfilment with the veil removed, suggests that it was written down for *our* instruction. Whether he thinks the original author/compiler was aware of this or it was known only to God is unclear. However, from our perspective, this looks very much like taking a text out of context and using it simply for its rhetorical effect. This leads to the most crucial question in studies on the use of the Old Testament in the New.

### Our Perspective or Theirs?

Are we trying to describe how it looked to them or how it looks to us? It is clear by the use of the fulfilment language that the New Testament authors saw the life, death and resurrection of Christ as a fulfilment of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:3f). But by any reasonable use of language, some of the quoted texts do not appear to be promises at all, and some of the fulfilments look like the result of special pleading. Lack of clarity over whether scholars are trying to describe how it looked to the New Testament authors or how it looks to us has caused enormous confusion. For example, some scholars stress the differences between first century exegesis and twentieth-century historical rigour and so use words like 'arbitrary', '*ad hoc*' and 'out of context' to describe the Old Testament in the New. This sounds as if the New Testament authors had no respect for truth or the Old Testament. They simply made the text mean whatever they liked. But this hardly does justice to their explicit statements about the sacredness of the holy writings. Whatever we might think of their exegesis, it is clear that *they believe* that they are giving the true meaning of the text and expect their recipients to be convinced. On the other hand, those scholars that focus on the New Testament authors as serious exegetes, engaged in drawing out the true meaning of the ancient texts, sound as if they are unaware of modern historical study. They look as though they are engaged in special pleading, along the lines that Isaiah must have meant such and such because Paul says he did, even though any normal use of grammar and vocabulary suggests otherwise. Among those that are clear that they are describing the use of the Old Testament in the New from *our* perspective, three dominant analogies can be detected. These are *Ad hoc* Rhetoric, Presuppositional lenses and Artistic effects, and to them we now turn.

### *Ad hoc* Rhetoric

When Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4 ('you shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain') as justification for the payment of Christian workers, there is little reason to think that Paul started from the Deuteronomy text. He does not appear to be writing a commentary on the book (unlike some of the Qumran authors) and this happens to be his exegesis of 25:4. Rather, he appears to be pursuing an argument in 1 Corinthians and this verse came to mind in an *ad hoc* way. As Lindars

says, 'The New Testament writers do not take an Old Testament book or passage, and sit down and ask, 'What does this mean?' They are concerned with the kerygma, which they need to teach and to defend and to understand themselves. Believing that Christ is the fulfilment of the promises of God, and that they are living in the age to which all the scriptures refer, they employ the Old Testament in an *ad hoc* way, making recourse to it just when and how they find it helpful for their purposes.'<sup>5</sup>

Although Lindars is not explicit about this, I have placed him in the category of those who describe how it looks to us, since I think it is very unlikely that the New Testament authors would themselves have seen their use of Scripture as *ad hoc*. But that is how it appears to us, at least according to Lindars. The value of this position is perhaps the challenge that it lays down. Anyone who disagrees that the use of the Old Testament in the New is *ad hoc* must provide a rationale that explains why an author chose those particular Old Testament texts and how they arrive at their interpretations. Most have done this on the analogy of the lens.

### Presuppositional Lenses

With my work on the book of Revelation in mind, Greg Beale says that what 'to some may appear to be John's novel interpretations of the Old Testament are the result of his new presuppositional lenses through which he perceives the Old Testament'.<sup>6</sup> John's use of Scripture is not arbitrary or *ad hoc* but is the result of a set of presuppositional lenses through which he now views the ancient texts. According to Beale, the most significant of these are:

- (1) Christ corporately represents true Israel of the Old and New Testament;
- (2) history is unified by a wise and sovereign plan, so that the earlier parts of canonical history are designed to correspond typologically and point to later parts of inscripturated history;
- (3) the age of end-time fulfillment has been inaugurated with Christ's first coming;
- (4) in the light of points 2 and 3, the later parts of biblical history interpret earlier parts, so that Christ as the centre of history is the key to interpreting the earlier portions of the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

If we grant the viability of these presuppositions, he says, then 'John's interpretation of the Old Testament shows a careful understanding of Old Testament contexts'. On the other hand, if we regard them as false, then John's interpretation of Scripture 'must be seen as alien to the intention of the Old Testament'.<sup>8</sup> In other words, what might seem to us as 'novel interpretations' are explained by understanding (and accepting) the lenses through which the New Testament authors viewed the ancient texts.

5 B. Lindars, 'The Place of the OT in the Formation of NT Theology', *NTS* 23 (1976/7), p 64.

7 Beale, *OT in Revelation*, p 128.

8 Beale, *OT in Revelation*, p 128.

6 G. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNT Sup 166, Sheffield Academic Press 1998, p 128.

Numerous scholars have also used the language of 'lenses' but the analogy is not without its problems. Fundamentally, it is an analogy which suggests predictability. There is a direct correspondence between what one sees and how things are. And once one has got to know the particular properties of the lens, one should be able to predict the resulting interpretations. But when one starts to speak of lenses, in the plural, the image becomes less useful, for how will the interpreter decide which lens or combination of lenses to use in particular situations? In other words, what is the principle at work when a New Testament author cites some texts as being literally true, others as true only when understood in the light of recent events, others as true only when quoted in variant forms, others only when the wording is altered, and yet others only when given an inverted or opposite meaning? The lens image might be an appropriate description for each single instance, but it does not have the explanatory power to describe the overall situation. At root, there is always a deeper question: What is it that governs the choice of which lens to use on any particular text?

For example, in order to explain how in Romans 3:10-18, Paul can take texts that draw a distinction between the righteous and the wicked (Psalms 5, 10, 14, 36 and 140) and use them as proof that 'all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin' (Romans 3:9), Dunn<sup>9</sup> suggests that Paul now reads the scriptures without the 'blinkers of Jewish presumption of privilege'. Thus texts that originally referred to Gentiles can now be applied to Jews and texts which originally applied to Jews can now be applied to Gentiles. And this explains how in Romans 9:25-26, Paul is able to cite promises addressed to Jews (from Hosea) and apply them to Gentiles. However, when he wants to make a particular point about Gentiles (as in Romans 15:9-12), Paul thinks it is sufficient to cite a number of texts which contain the word *ethne* ('Gentiles'). Thus Paul can sometimes apply texts to Gentiles because they contain the word 'Gentiles', and sometimes apply them to Jews because there is now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. What sort of lens is it that explains both phenomena?

Criticism has also come from another quarter. Many have used terms like 'Christological' or 'Messianic' exegesis to indicate that the lens is primarily the coming of Christ. But others have argued that this is too narrow to describe the sheer variety of texts and interpretations offered in the New Testament. For example, Steyn<sup>10</sup> denies that the speeches of Acts revolve around Christological exegesis. If anything, it is Theological exegesis, for the dominant idea is that God's sovereign plan is being worked out. Within that, some texts are interpreted in the light of Christ's death and resurrection but not the majority. Stephen's speech, for example, is full of Old Testament references but few of them are subject to a particular Christological exegesis. And Richard Hays notes that the key to understanding Paul's use of the Old Testament is not a narrow Christological lens but broader categories like 'God's purpose to raise up a worldwide community of people who confess his sovereignty and manifest his justice'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Hays says

9 J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC 38, Word Books, Waco 1988, pp 149-151. See my article, 'The Catena of Romans 3:10-18', ExpT 106 (1995), pp 367-70.

10 G. J. Steyn, *Septuagint Quotations in the Context of the Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acta Apostolorum*, Pharos, Kampen 1995.

11 R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press, 1989), p 177.

that Paul's hermeneutics are not so much 'Christocentric' as 'Ecclesiocentric'. God's purpose has always been to raise up a people and this is what holds the two Testaments together, preventing them from becoming merely 'type' and 'anti-type'.

### Artistic Effects

A third possibility of describing the use of the Old Testament in the New from our perspective is to give up the task of discerning the author's intention and concentrate on describing what they have produced. For whatever reason, the author of the book of Revelation has brought together a huge number of texts to create something new. They have never been in this relationship before. The analogy I used in my monograph was that of a symphony. The images of Revelation are like different sounds which interact with one another, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes negating and sometimes producing complex harmonics. The reader hears 'voices' from more than one direction. The logic of the passage provides one source for meaning. But texts that have been used before bring with them connotations that evoke other contexts. The reader, in order to achieve coherence of meaning, must in some way configure these different 'voices'. One is therefore trying to describe something that is dynamic, a complex set of interactions, rather than a settled state.

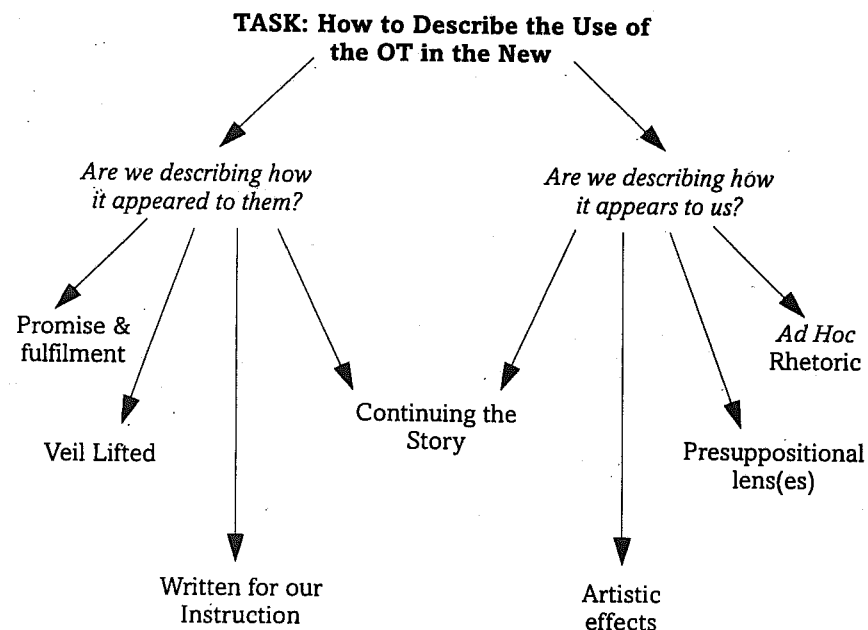
My key illustration of this was the Lion/Lamb juxtaposition in Revelation 5. Most commentators interpret this on the lens metaphor, that the OT military hopes associated with the Lion are now to be seen in the light of the slain Lamb. The actual manifestation of the Messiah as a sacrificial lamb is the lens through which all military images are now to be viewed. Thus in a frequently quoted summary, Caird says, 'Wherever the Old Testament says "Lion", read "Lamb". Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.'<sup>12</sup>

But what I sought to point out is that this does not do justice to the powerful Lamb figure that is presented in the rest of the book. When people encounter the Lamb in Revelation, they are not amazed at its humility and lowliness. They are terrified by its power. In the very next chapter, they hide from the wrath of the Lamb (6:16). When the ten kings make war on the Lamb they are utterly destroyed for he is 'Lord of lords and King of kings' (17:4). In other words, not only has the Lion undergone reinterpretation by being associated with the slain Lamb. The slain Lamb has undergone reinterpretation by being associated with the warring Lion. And this is where the lens image breaks down, for it is fundamentally a one-way image. That is, if the particular lens make objects look smaller or fatter, exactly the opposite takes place if you look from the opposite side. It won't therefore serve as analogy for the Lion undergoing reinterpretation by being juxtaposed with a Lamb and the Lamb undergoing reinterpretation by being juxtaposed with a Lion.

12 G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, A & C Black, London 1984, p 75 and quoted with approval by Sweet, Boring and Bauckham.

## Continuing the Story

The last analogy I wish to mention is that of 'Continuing the Story'. Drawing on the work of Richard Hays and Tom Wright, Sylvia Keesmaat argues that what has often been seen as *ad hoc* allusions in Romans 8:18-39, are in fact a careful retelling of the exodus story. She points out that the themes of Romans 8:18-39 are adoption, being led by the Spirit, crying out to God as father, suffering, inheritance and glory. But these are all themes associated with the exodus story. Indeed, with this background in mind, phrases like 'you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again' take on fresh significance. The besetting sin of the wilderness generation was their desire to return to Egypt and slavery again. The spirit-inspired Christian must not follow their example but enter into the inheritance. She freely admits that Israel's story has ended in 'an unexpected way' and so one cannot simply stress continuity between new and old in an uncritical way. But it is the story that governs the shape of Paul's use of the Old Testament. Thus the Gentile Christians in Rome are exhorted not to abandon the tradition, 'for their own experience of God in Christ Jesus is rooted in the whole story of Israel. Adam and Abraham explain their past, the exodus gives meaning to their present, the whole story provides hope for their future'.<sup>13</sup> Of course if we wish to argue that this is equally true from our perspective, we would be making a statement about the truth of Christianity (or a particular form of it). The 'unexpected' ending of the story was not the only possible ending, as the growth of Rabbinic Judaism makes clear. And we still await the revelation of the final ending.



## Conclusion

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has recently said that all history is carried out on the basis of analogy.<sup>14</sup> Evidence does not just arrange itself into patterns. Someone has to impose a pattern on it and see how well it fits. This study was prompted by seeing my work criticized by the analogy of a bowl of fruit. But I am grateful for the criticism for it has helped me to think through the place of analogies in my own work.<sup>15</sup> I suggested that reading the book of Revelation is a bit like listening to a symphony, where the different instruments rise and fall, interact with one another and require the listener to do something in order to obtain meaning. But perhaps it is not like a symphony at all. Perhaps that was an interpretative analogy that skewed the evidence in order to try and persuade readers of the book that my analysis was correct. Or more likely (I hope), perhaps the analogy is good at illuminating certain aspects of the text whilst obscuring other features. I can see some truth in all of the analogies I have described in this article. But it does not appear to me that any one of them is able to adequately explain everything. Walter Brueggemann calls this our postmodern condition. He summarizes it in three propositions:

1. Our knowing is inherently *contextual*. Descartes wanted to insist that context was not relevant to knowing. It is, however, now clear that what one knows and sees depends upon where one stands or sits.
2. It follows that contexts are quite *local*, and the more one generalizes, the more one loses or fails to notice context. Localism means that it is impossible to voice large truth. All one can do is to voice local truth and propose that it pertains elsewhere.
3. It follows from contextualism and localism that knowledge is inherently *pluralistic*, a cacophony of claims, each of which rings true to its own advocates.<sup>16</sup>

Whether 'postmodern' is the right word to describe this could be debated. Some take the term to mean the denial of all truth-claims and hence the impossibility of knowing anything. But what I think Brueggemann is saying is that no one has a monopoly on the truth. Every scholar must use certain analogies (frame of reference, world view, interpretative strategy, call it what you like) in order to try and make sense of certain phenomena (in this case, the use of the Old Testament in the New). But no one analogy simultaneously does justice to all its aspects. That the New Testament authors saw Christ as the fulfilment of the scriptures is undeniable. But it does not unlock every door. Other analogies are needed to explain the particular choices and interpretations found in the New Testament. Some texts suggest that the veil has been removed in Christ and that the true meaning is now available *for the first time*. But if that was their consistent position, it would undermine any attempt to use the scriptures in an apologetic sense.

13 S. Keesmaat, *Paul and his Story. (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Story*, JSNTSup 181, Sheffield Academic Press 1999, p 228.  
14 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: the Politics of Biblical Studies*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1999, p 52.

15 Beale and I have also exchanged letters and phone calls on these issues and both acknowledge that the debate has prompted us to think more deeply about the issues.  
16 W. Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, SCM, London 1993, pp 8f.

Finally, I do not think Bruegemman's position means that scholars have to be shy about their findings. They have interpreted a text from a particular standpoint, which includes gender, race, social location, personality and circumstances, as well as various spiritual and intellectual commitments. If they are convinced by their findings, they will offer their 'local truth' to others, in sermons, in books, in journals and in ordinary conversation. If it rings true to others it will gain ground. But it will also meet rival theories which come at it from a different perspective. Sometimes, this might result in the abandonment of a hypothesis (sadly, this seldom happens very often). But other times, the 'public' will see useful insights in both interpretations and wish to preserve them both (hence the four Gospels!). Some will look at the diagram and see it as a mass of conflicting theories. I see it as a witness both to the industry of scholars engaged in this area and the complexity of the issues that it raises. It seems to me that the human condition is that we cannot understand anything except by analogy. But every analogy both illuminates and distorts.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

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