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GENERAL *and* SPECIAL HERMENEUTICS

[W]e are not to confine our view to the present period, but to look forward to remote futurity.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, 1788¹

How the preacher may move from Scripture to sermon, from an ancient text to modern praxis in the life of a Christian congregation, is the burden of this work. As with all literary productions intended to stand the test of time and the stretch of space, the Bible, in a very special way, was written to communicate, not only to an immediate audience, but also to God's people located far in place and period from those at the text's origin. And not just to communicate; God's goal is to conform his people into the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that this ancient text must be preached to a modern audience in a manner that yields application to change lives for the glory of God. In reflecting on this whole process, where does the preacher begin?

It all starts with a text. Scripture, the predominant medium of divine communication to mankind, is textual. And so any approach to the interpretation of Scripture must begin with language, the essence of texts, the principle of all communication and, indeed, the universal medium of being—we are immersed

1. "The Federalist No. 34: Concerning the General Power of Taxation (continued)," *Independent Journal* (January 5, 1788), no pages.

in a sea of language from birth to death. Therefore, general hermeneutics, the science of interpretation of *any* text (hence *general* hermeneutics), comes into play in biblical interpretation. But the church has also construed Scripture as the word of God, divine discourse. In other words, Scripture is not simply any text; it is a *special* text. Therefore, special hermeneutics, the science of interpretation of this unique biblical text (hence *special* or *theological* hermeneutics), also has to operate in biblical interpretation. Chapter 1 addresses the essential features of general and special hermeneutics that enable the reading of Scripture by the preacher.²

PREVIEW: GENERAL AND SPECIAL HERMENEUTICS³

The peculiar features of the special text that the church calls “Scripture” include: its ultimate Author, the singular nature of its referent (what it is all about: God and his relationship to his creation), and its spiritually transforming power.⁴ Therefore, seeking the intent of the text’s author, comprehending its referent, and responding to it are critical features of biblical interpretation. In fact these are features transferrable to the interpretation of *any* text. One might even say that it is *because* the Bible is read that way—with attention to author, referent, and response—that other texts can be read that way, too, *mutatis mutandis*. George Steiner points out that “any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, . . . any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling [i.e., a general hermeneutic] is . . . underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence [i.e., a special hermeneutic].”⁵ For God is the ultimate Cause (or Author), enabling every other intermediate cause (or author); he is the ultimate Meaning, enabling every other meaningful discourse about referents; and he is the ultimate Authority, from whom is derived every other authority that beckons us to respond.

2. While the focus, here and throughout this work, will be squarely upon the function of the Bible in the pulpit, the paradigm of interpretation proposed in this work is critical for *any* reading of the Bible designed to culminate in application/life-change.

3. Portions of this chapter are reworked from Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (LNTS 393; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009).

4. Paul Ricoeur, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia, and Faith,” in *Protocol of the Seventeenth Colloquy, 4 November 1975* (ed. W. Wuellner; Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 2–4.

5. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3.

In effect, then, every book is to be read as the Bible is—seeking authorial intent, comprehending textual referent, and responding to its overtures. The reading of the Bible is the paradigm for every other kind of reading that respects author, privileges content, and applies truth. In other words, general hermeneutics exists because there exists a special hermeneutic—the construal of Scripture as the *viva vox Dei* (“living voice of God”).⁶ Special hermeneutics is, thus, one of a kind, not just a small plot in the larger terrain of general hermeneutics. Indeed, it is the other way around: “general hermeneutics is inescapably theological.”⁷

However, this subjection of general hermeneutics to special hermeneutics does not mean that one can dispense with the former. After all, the Bible is a text, albeit a text like no other. But a text it remains, and the interpreter must resort to general hermeneutics in its interpretation. Therefore this chapter will first consider *general hermeneutics*; it will conclude with an examination of Rules of Reading that constitute the *special hermeneutic* of Scripture—the unique, special rules that govern the interpretation of this unique, special text. These reading guidelines serve as boundaries within which the interpreter must remain in order to be faithful to the text and to the intention of its Author and authors.⁸ With the establishment of these markers the interpreter can now proceed to explore the particular preaching text, the pericope. This sermonic chunk of text will be the consideration of chapter 2.

GENERAL HERMENEUTICS

Discourse is the mediator between mind and world; what is thought in the mind becomes what is expressed in the world, “indefinitely extending the battlefield of the expressed at the expense of the unexpressed.”⁹ Both speech and writing expand the frontiers of expression as spoken and written utterances are made. While text inscription is distinct from vocal articulation in both performance

6. John Webster, *Word and Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 47, 58.

7. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 213. Therefore, the “[u]nderstanding—of the Bible or of any other text—is a matter of ethics, indeed of spirituality” (*ibid.*, 231).

8. For the purposes of this work, I do not make any particular distinction between the intentions of these two parties, divine and human. When referring to one, I will implicitly be referring to the other as well.

9. Paul Ricoeur, “Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language,” in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (ed. Mario J. Valdés; Hertfordshire, U.K.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 69. Or as T. S. Eliot put it, “a raid on the inarticulate” (*Four Quartets*, “East Coker,” V).

and consequence, writing nevertheless shares with speech many of the properties of a communicative act; it is a particular kind of “saying.”¹⁰ But though textuality is kin to orality, the differences between the two are substantial. These differences have significant ramifications for textual interpretation, especially for the interpretation of the text that is the Bible, and most especially for the interpretation of that text for preaching—hermeneutics for homiletics.

Textuality and Its Consequences

Though the writing of Scripture was preceded by the utterances of the law-giver, the storyteller, the seer, the songwriter, the teacher, and the oral discourses of Jesus himself, it was the inscripturated word that was recognized by the Christian community as the canonical word of God, according the word pre-eminence in Christian faith and practice.¹¹ Such a lofty regard for the text is based on the assumption that “this kind of discourse is not senseless, that it is worthwhile to analyze it, because something is said that is not said by other kinds of discourse”—i.e., the overarching theme of God and his relationship to his creation.¹² Thus, biblical discourse, discourse of a special kind, calls for the employment of a special hermeneutic. Yet, there are some characteristics of texts in general, biblical and otherwise, that have to be considered (general hermeneutics) in the interpretation even of this special text.

The first and fundamental trait of any discourse, spoken or scripted, is that it is an *act* of communication whereby somebody “says” something to somebody else about something in some manner. In this, an inscribed discourse is no different from that which is spoken: both are communicative actions. However, in distinction from a speech-event, a text is a discourse that is fixed, preserved, archived, and disseminated by writing.¹³ It is a stable locus of meaning, but—and this is key—one that has undergone significant upheavals in its passage from speech to script.

Something has happened when writing occurs, when compared to speaking.

10. This work sees texts, including biblical pericopes, as performing “speech” acts. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1977), 79–200; and Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 71–85, for vigorous defenses of writing as a “speech” act.

11. Acknowledging the primacy of their written scriptures, the Qur’an refers to Christians and Jews as *ahl al-Kitāb* (أهل الكتاب), “people of the Book”; *Surah al-Ma’idah* 5:77, and elsewhere). Judaism, in like fashion, refers to Jews as עם הספר (*m hsp*), “people of the book”).

12. Paul Ricoeur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” *JR* 54 (1974): 71.

13. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145, 147.

In all discourse, there is an implicit dialectic between the *event* of the utterance (the act of saying) and the *content* thereof (what is said). In spoken discourse, there is an intimate association between these two poles with each getting adequate emphasis: the event of speaking is coincident with the conveyance of meaningful content. However, at the moment of writing, a radical breach is created between the event of communication and the content of communication, between the act of saying and what was said. The event is now potentially distanced from content, frozen as the latter is in its state of writtenness. What this change accomplishes is the fixation, not of the event of communication (the *saying*), but of the content of communication (the *said*). Ricoeur's observation is apt: "The human fact [and face!] disappears. Now material 'marks' convey the message"—no longer lung, larynx, and tongue, but ink, quill, and paper bear the fixed/frozen message. Writing has rendered the content of the saying autonomous, an orphan, dislodged from the event of saying.¹⁴ In essence, texts have been estranged from their creators, their original audiences, and the circumstances of their composition.¹⁵ This is the phenomenon technically called *distanciation*, the distancing between the event of saying and the content of saying. Distanciation is thus a constitutive element of the transaction of writing, and an integral property of all texts.¹⁶ From an oral-aural world, where the utterance was spoken and heard, the message has been translocated into a textual-visual world where the discourse is written and seen. The resulting emancipation of the text from the oral situation has unique consequences for the affiliations between text and author, hearer, and referent of written discourse.

Text and Author

As was noted, the liberation of communication content from communication event, accomplished in the event of writing, proclaims the escape of the text's

14. *Ibid.*, 134, 139–40.

15. Of course, this estrangement from author refers only to the alienation of the *human* agency involved in the creation of the text of Scripture. But, notwithstanding the constant presence of the Spirit of God (the divine Author of the Bible) with the believing interpreter and the inspired text, it is this remoteness of the *human* authors that ultimately necessitates the interpretive enterprise of the Bible—the engagement of languages, the exploration of historical contexts, the examination of literary and rhetorical aspects of the text, etc. Preaching itself is a consequence necessitated by the estrangement of Scripture's human authors. Were Paul and others available to congregations, the church would not need preachers.

16. Distanciation also occurs with audio and video recordings of speech that are disseminated far and wide, but to some extent, the event of communication is itself captured and frozen along with the content of communication. In any case, these technological advances came much later.

career from the finite horizons of its author. This, however, does not imply a total loss of tethering of text to authorial meaning, or that readers have to throw up their hands in despair. Though there is, in writing, some degree of freedom of text from the author, it is not a complete severance that would make authorial guidance totally unavailable for interpretation.¹⁷ Distanciation does not render the text utterly autonomous, for the text bears with it, to some extent at least, artifacts of the event of writing and traces of the author in its script, medium, content, arrangement, etc.¹⁸ For instance, even the determination by a reader of the language of a written composition is an acknowledgment of what its author intended. The phenomenon of “false friends” illustrates this eloquently: Should “g-i-f-t” be read in English or in German (= “poison”)? The decision is always based upon an assumption of what language the author chose to write in, a choice manifest in the text.¹⁹ Letters and wills are prime examples of texts always regarded as bearing the intentional presence of their authors or testators. Therefore the fallacy of baptizing the text as an authorless, absolute entity, detached and completely bereft of any authorial vestige, must be avoided.²⁰ In other words, despite distanciation, authorial fingerprints can be detected in the inscription; such residues of intent are essential for interpretation, and are sufficiently present in texts to establish the writer’s purpose.

Text and Hearer

In the visual world of the text, receivers of the discourse are no longer hearers; they have been turned into readers, for the text has escaped not only the author, but also those within earshot, and it is now rendered accessible to reading audi-

17. Francis Watson stresses the human agency in writing: “Like speech, writing bears within it an essential reference to its origin in human action, and without this it cannot be understood” (*Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 98). As Northrop Frye has noted, “[o]ne has to assume, as an essential heuristic axiom, that the work as produced constitutes the definitive record of the writer’s intention” (*Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957], 87).

18. In modern writing, these artifacts might include details of the edition, printing, and publication of the text, authorial bio data, acknowledgements, dedications, prefaces, etc.

19. Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, “Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction,” *CI* 14 (1987): 55–57.

20. One must also be careful to avoid the opposing fallacy of considering the text merely as a window through which one can see into the author’s mind. The author’s psyche, as well as events of the history recounted by the text, and speculative reconstructions of the text’s forebears, are all elements that are *behind* the text (see chapter 2). For preaching purposes, it is the text itself that must be privileged, not anything behind it.

ences situated anywhere, anytime.²¹ The unique nature of writing gives it the ability to reach receivers other than those originally intended by the author. As Lessig observed wryly, “Texts are transportable. They move. Because written, they are carried. Because carried, they are read—in different places and at different times. Nothing . . . can stop this semiotic peripateticism. If you write it, it will roam.”²² And these roaming pieces of communication, by virtue of their textuality and frozenness, can fall into the hands of a potential universe of readers.

Though writing may be addressed to a particular individual, this specification is less precise than in oral communication. The reader is, more often than not, beyond the physical vicinity of the author, and unknown to him or her. Anyone who can read and is willing to volunteer for the role of addressee may undertake the reading of that particular text. This potential universalization of the audience is one of the more radical effects of written communication. Yet, even when the identity of the reader is not stipulated and the possibility exists for an indiscriminate readership, the text may be directed towards an authorially intended consumer belonging to a particular community and perhaps even sharing the same authorial concerns that motivated the production of the text in the first place.²³ This is, of course, pertinent to the interpretation of the Bible within a congregation that recognizes that writing as its Scripture, within a community committed to the same God who inspired that text millennia ago. In short, textuality and the consequences of distanciation have made this special, divine discourse potentially accessible to all of God’s people in every age.

Text and Referent

Thirdly—and this is perhaps one of the more notable consequences—distanciation affects ostensive referents, i.e., those items referred to in oral communication that can be shown, pointed out, labeled, or otherwise indicated by virtue of

21. The combination of authorial and readerly absence from the event of reading and the event of writing, respectively, Ricoeur calls a “double eclipse” (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 146–47). The exclusion of an author–reader dialogue is what renders texts “inherently contumacious,” for there is no way to directly refute an author—the text always says exactly the same thing as before. This asymmetry in written communication makes it almost an authorial monologue; there can be no arguing with the writer, perhaps “one reason why books have been burnt” (Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [London: Routledge, 1982], 79).

22. Lawrence Lessig, “The Limits of Lieber,” *Cardozo L. Rev.* 16 (1995): 2249.

23. Watson, *Text and Truth*, 99, 102; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 31.

the collocation in time and space of speaker and hearer: this person, that house, these shoes, those trees, this day, and so on, elements that are integral to any vocal utterance between individuals sharing the same time and space. However, for those not directly addressed by the speaker, and not sharing time and space with the speaker, these referents are elusive. So also for the “orphaned” text, dislodged from its generating agent, event, and original addressees: ostensive referents of the text are no longer immediately and directly accessible to readers far away.²⁴ A bit of Jewish folklore, in the form of a letter, demonstrates this phenomenon well²⁵:

Dear Riwke,

Be good enough to send me your slippers. Of course, I mean “my slippers” and not “your slippers.” But, if you read “my slippers,” you will think I mean your slippers. Whereas, if I write: “send me your slippers,” you will read *your* slippers and will understand that I want *my* slippers. So: send me your slippers.

A “decontextualization” occurs with texts that the letter-writer to Riwke was acutely and painfully conscious of. Whose slippers are being demanded here? However, paradoxically, textuality is a *necessary* condition for the preservation of meaning across time and space, because textuality is designed to overcome the time and space restrictions imposed by orality. Those who could not be otherwise reached are now within reachable distance, for texts are transportable and movable, and they are carried and read. One need only imagine science, as we know it, occurring in a purely oral culture, to understand the immense value of texts and textuality. Notwithstanding this significant advantage, texts have undergone distanciation, and this distanciation of referents necessitates the enterprise of interpretation: What is the text all about—what is the author referring to, where and when, why and wherefore? In other words, if he is to respond to the writer in valid application, Riwke is going to have to figure out whose slippers are being referred to in that letter.

With regard to Scripture, these same consequences of distanciation operate by virtue of its textuality: the human author is unavailable; readers are located far from the origin of the text; and ostensive referents are not accessible in di-

24. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 134, 139–40, 145.

25. Marina Yaguello, *Language through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

rect or immediate fashion. Yet, this unique discourse of the biblical text mandates its own application in times and spaces distant from the circumstances of its provenance.²⁶ If Scripture is to be employed in these new locales, this gap of distanciation must be bridged and, importantly, the referent of the text—what it is all about (its thrust)—must be discovered. All interpretation, especially that engaged in by the homiletician seeking valid sermonic application, is an attempt to understand this thrust of the text. How may this be faithfully and fittingly accomplished?

Here is where what is considered to be Paul Ricoeur's most important contribution to interpretation theory, the *world in front of the text*, achieves notability: this world is the text's referent (what the text is all about) that transcends the effects of distanciation. Ricoeur's notion provides the framework for the interpretation, by readers in ages and places far away, of a text that has undergone distanciation. For such texts, this concept is particularly useful, and even more so when their interpretation is intended to culminate in application, as with sermons on Scripture. What exactly is this *world in front of the text* and how does it help application?

The World in Front of the Text

The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author's action of employing language to project a transcending vision—what Ricoeur called the *world in front of the text*. He explains:

In oral discourse, face-to-face interlocutors can, in the final analysis, refer what they are talking about to the surrounding world common to them. Only writing can by addressing itself to anyone who knows how to read, refer to a world that is not there between the interlocutors. . . . It is neither behind the text as the presumed author, nor in the text as its structure, but unfolded *in front of it*.²⁷

The role of this *world in front of the text* in theological hermeneutics, and its significance for the faith and practice of the Christian community—specifically, its importance for sermonic application—is the major consideration of this work.

Ricoeur's world is based on the understanding that literary texts are unique

26. See Deut 4:10; 6:6–7, 20–25; 29:14–15; Matt 28:19–20; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; etc.

27. Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," *USQR* 34 (1979): 217 (emphasis added).

referential phenomena. One does not attend, for instance, a performance of *Macbeth* to acquire knowledge of the history of Scotland; instead, one goes to the play to learn what it is to gain a kingdom and lose one's soul.²⁸ Aristotle would agree, for what *actually* happens in a narrative, even if representing historic reality (τὰ καθ' ἑκάστον, *ta kath hekaston*, the specific), is portrayed as what *always* happens in the transactions of mankind (τὰ καθόλου, *ta katholou*, the universal/general) (*Poet.* 9.1–4, 9–10). Thus, in *Macbeth*, the actual story of the dastardly assassination of a king can be construed as what always happens in human dramas when people are driven by the lust for power. One may not descend to murder (the specific), but such craving and coveting without regard for morality or consequences leaves only tragedy in its wake and guilt in its maelstrom (the universal/general). The textual specifics (τὰ καθ' ἑκάστον) thus portray a transcending generality (τὰ καθόλου). All manner of literary compositions, likewise, make these kinds of references, inviting their readers to occupy the place of those limned in the text, to partake of their experiences, and to feel as they did. Through the represented situations, the author is portraying experiences likely to be τὰ καθόλου common to humanity.²⁹ All of this is intended to elicit a response from the reader. The text is thus a tool the author employs for “manipulating language and structure to incorporate . . . a larger, more complex vision”—the *world in front of the text*.³⁰ It is to this projected world, the referent of the text, that the reader is called to respond.

Clifford Geertz's commentary on Balinese cockfights is an illuminating analogy of the use of texts as instruments to depict worlds, though in his account the discourse instrument is not a text, but a culture—which Geertz labels

28. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1964), 63–64. Philip Wheelwright asserted that religious and poetic discourses make such “a kind of trans-subjective reference” that points beyond the specifics of the text (*The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* [rev. ed.; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1968], 4).

29. Literary works such as novels bear “links of possibility” between characters and reader that enable such identification; readers thereby recognize that story as their own (the general/universal), though the particular details of the novel (the specific) may differ greatly from those of their own lives. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 5, 31.

30. Charles Altieri, “The Poem as Act: A Way to Reconcile Presentational and Mimetic Theories,” *Iowa Rev.* 6.3–4 (1975): 107–8. Also see Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 19–22. Ricoeur sees this movement operating with *every* textual utterance. See his *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies on the Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny, with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 256.

an “assemblage of texts.”³¹ The cockfight (the “culture-text” here) refers beyond itself to portray a greater reality, another world—a “meta-world.” One does not participate in this wrangle of roosters merely to observe a fight between fowl, but rather to see “what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed . . . feels like when, attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to the extremes of fury, he has totally triumphed or been brought totally low.”³² The Balinese cockfight points beyond the world *behind* the culture-text—the birds, the breeders, the bets, the battles—to project a world *in front of* the culture-text: the machismo of cockfight patrons. The cockfight thus beckons the Balinese man to live in this projected world of manishness and dominance: “Be a virile specimen of masculinity!”

Thus a text may not only tell the reader about the world *behind* the text (what “actually” happened—the historical data: the cockfight, in our case), it also projects another ideal world *in front of* the text that bids the reader inhabit it (what it means to be macho, in the Balinese context). A view of life is portrayed, projecting for the reader a world beyond the confines of the text. Rather than being simply *presented* by a text, life is *represented* as something, inviting the reader to see the world in one way and not another, and to respond by complying with the demands of that world.³³ Allegories, parables, and moral fables are all examples of utterances supporting such projected worlds. By the telling of a tale, a point is made, a world is portrayed.

One sees this even in Aesop’s fables. Take, for instance, the one about the dog that found a bone and was returning home with its booty. It happened to cross a bridge, and as it looked into the water it spotted another dog with a bone. You know the rest of the story: greed takes over, it barks at what was actually its own reflection in the stream, and loses the bone it had. While the story is about dogs, bones, streams, and reflections, it is *really* about not being greedy. It projects a world in which contentment is a key priority, a world in which a critical precept is that contentment will prevent loss, and a world in which one practices the prudence of contentment. In essence, this world is the referent of

31. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), 448 (see 412–53 for the entire account). “[C]ultural manifestations must be read as texts are read.” Indeed culture has its own “grammar” (Morton W. Bloomfield, “Allegory as Interpretation,” *NLH* 3 [1972]: 303).

32. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 450.

33. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

the text; this is the thrust of the text; this is what the text is about; and this is what Aesop would want readers to catch and respond to. Ricoeur's notion of the *world in front of the text* thus provides a conceptual category to commence the movement towards application.

That, however, is not a property of fiction alone. All literary texts function in this manner and project worlds in front of themselves; thus, a text serves as an instrument of that action.³⁴ In this way, such discourses have validity for the future, capable as they are of being applied, despite the effects of distancing. Scripture, too, is intended to be employed far from its originating circumstances. It is to be applied to the faith and practice in the contemporary time, and all times, of those who accept the Bible as Scripture. Therefore, this unique and worthy discourse needs the gap of distancing to be bridged and the referent of the text located. Then, and only then, can valid application be made by the reader. As will be developed, Ricoeur's idea of the *world in front of the text* plays a useful role in understanding how, by means of this projected world (the referent of the text), valid application may be derived. The *world in front of the text* is a world created by the author by means of the text; it is a world that is intended to be inhabited, by the reader's alignment with the precepts, priorities, and practices of that projected world (in the cockfight text, how "real men" ought to behave). Appropriate alignment with the implicit demands of the textual world constitutes valid application of that text. In other words, this world is the text's direction for application in the future.³⁵ The burden of the entire operation of hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, is the discernment of this world; the task of interpretation is the explication and subsequent application of that projected world.

For a text that has undergone distancing and is intended to be applied in the future, as is Scripture, interpretation cannot cease with the elucidation of its linguistic and structural elements (what may be considered as the world of the text) or the history and events it represents (the world *behind* the text), but

34. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 122, 124. Also see Raymond W. Gibbs, "Nonliteral Speech Acts in Text and Discourse," in *The Handbook of Discourse Processes* (eds. Arthur C. Graesser, Morton Ann Gernsbacher, and Susan R. Goldman; Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum, 2003), 358–61.

35. Such a world is specific to that text and derived from its particular and peculiar content: "[f]or every unique text there is such a world" proper to it (Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," 11–12; idem, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 140–42). Thus the text must be privileged in interpretation, for it alone forms the raw material for the discernment of the *world in front of the text*, its unique referent, what it is all about.

must proceed further to discern the world *in front of* the text—the referent of the author, the thrust of the text. This projected world which readers are invited to inhabit forms the intermediary between text and application, and enables one to respond validly to the text, for the world implicitly provides direction for future behavior.³⁶ In sum, by portraying such a world, the text becomes an advocate for that world, recommending adoption by the reader of the precepts, priorities, and practices of that world it projects. How exactly does the *world in front of the text* function in this way for its distant and future readers?

Futurity and Meaning of Texts

For any text, the content is consumed at an event of reading subsequent to the event of writing. Therefore, information conveyed by a text is not necessarily relevant to a readership far away in time and space; this is akin to reading a local newspaper from another city, a decade after its publication. In other words, the “literature of knowledge,” that merely conveys information, usually becomes outdated as the distancing of the text creates a breach between the event of communication and the content of communication. The relevance of the content for the reader is likely to diminish in proportion to the time-space distance of the content from the event. Pure information rarely transcends time and space to provide direction for future application; it merely tells us how things *were* in the past, not how things *could/should* be in the future. On the other hand, it is the “literature of power,” projecting a world in front of itself, that never grows outdated. By its world projection, it retains the capacity to say something universally relevant across the passage of time.³⁷ Thus, its referentiality persists into an indefinite future, and the world projected gives readers direction for application.³⁸

Authors of such literary compositions, conscious of the future-directedness of their work, typically intend meanings to go beyond what is attended to at that moment and locus of writing, so that the effects of such texts are boundlessly

36. How this may be conducted will be established in theory in this chapter and demonstrated in chapter 2, with regard to the pericope, the preaching unit of the biblical text.

37. Obviously, not all texts possess this futurity. Grocery lists, bank statements, inane blogs, emails, and a whole host of other published works that have only parochial concerns, provincial consequences, and personal value, will never interest anyone but the odd historian in a few decades’ time. It will be shown below that those texts that do possess futurity are the ones rightly labeled “classics,” specimens of the “literature of power.”

38. E. D. Hirsch, “Past Intentions and Present Meanings,” *Ess. Crit.* 33 (1983): 88.

extended in time and space. This future-direction of referents is an inherent property of textuality, particularly of those texts, such as the Bible, whose value has endured over time.³⁹ How are their future orientations carried by those texts? In brief, this section will demonstrate that it is by a text’s projection of a world that bears a *transhistorical intention* that it achieves this futurity. The discernment of this projected world is therefore an essential task of the interpreter, for from this intermediary alone may valid application be derived.

In common usage, “meaning” is usually restricted to the *original textual sense*—the explicit utterance meaning of a text. Quite perspicaciously, E. D. Hirsch extended the idea of the “meaning” of a text beyond the original textual sense to encompass what might conceivably lie in the realm of that text’s future use, for literature is typically an instrument designed for “broad and continuing future application.” Meaning, in light of this future-directedness, includes a *transhistorical intention*—a conceptual entity projected by the text that carries its thrust beyond the immediate time-space circumstances of the writing—and also future *exemplifications*—i.e., valid applications arising from that transhistorical intention.⁴⁰ “Meaning,” in the Hirschian model, thus comprises a triad: original textual sense, transhistorical intention, and exemplifications.

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Original Textual Sense | Transhistorical Intention | Exemplifications |

Here’s an analogy: London’s *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839 makes it an offence to repair a “carriage” on a street in England: “Every person shall be liable to a penalty . . . who, within the limits of the metropolitan police district, shall in any thoroughfare or public place . . . to the annoyance of the inhabitants or passengers . . . repair any part of any cart or carriage, except in cases of accident

39. Psalms 102:18 explicitly points to the future: “This will be written for a later generation.”

40. E. D. Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *CI* 11 (1984): 209; idem, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 51, 65; idem, “Past Intentions and Present Meanings,” 82; and idem, “Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory,” *NLH* 25 (1994): 549–67. In the span of almost three decades, Hirsch managed to generate an array of labels for his notions. However, the concepts indicated by the diverse designations are remarkably consistent across time. Therefore, rather than demonstrate the chronological development of these various terms, for the sake of clarity this work will keep the nomenclature consistent, even if this involves occasionally attributing to that writer an anachronistic designation.

where repair on the spot is necessary.”⁴¹ Normally, “meaning” would be restricted to “carriage” (= original textual sense). But it is obvious, considering the genre of the text—legal literature—that what was being intended by “carriage” went beyond just a “horse-drawn buggy.” In a future-directed sense, what the law meant by “carriage” was “vehicle using the road” (= transhistorical intention).

Though the *Act* was legislated at a time when automobiles were unknown, this transhistorical intention encompasses not only “carriage” (original textual sense), but also “truck,” “car,” etc. (exemplifications, i.e., potential future applications arising from the transhistorical intention). In this sense, all three—original textual sense, transhistorical intention, and future exemplifications—are, according to Hirsch, part of the “meaning” of the text, at least for interpretation leading to application. Exemplifications are valid applications of the original text simply because they fall within the boundaries of the text’s transhistorical intention. Thus the law of 1839 prohibiting carriage repair was validly read in the future as prohibiting truck or car repair, as well, by virtue of its transhistorical intention (“no broken vehicles on road”).

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Original Textual Sense | Transhistorical Intention | Exemplifications |
| No carriage repair | No broken vehicles on road | No truck, car, . . . repair |

In other words, the transhistorical intention of a text is not historically bounded (to “carriage,” in this case), but can transcend the contemporaneous time of its inscription, thereby even including within its scope potential future exemplifications not explicit in the utterance or text, or even conceived of by its author.⁴² Surely the creators of the 1839 law could not have had in mind motor vehicles of any kind. Rather, it is likely that what was sought to be imposed, in addition to the original textual sense (“carriage”), was a broader, more general, transhistorical intention that would encompass every possible future

41. *Metropolitan Police Act 1839* [c. 47], s. 54 [1]. See Stephen Guest, *Ronald Dworkin* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 183–84.

42. Including future exemplification (he calls it “application” or “appropriation”) within his concept of “meaning,” Gadamer asserts that “[n]ot just occasionally, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [2nd rev. ed.; trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; London: Continuum, 2004], 296).

exemplification of the text: *No broken vehicles of any kind on the road*, even those kinds of which the authors of the law were not consciously aware. The lawmakers may have been conscious of the transhistorical intention, but not necessarily of every one of the future exemplifications falling within it, whether truck, car, motorcycle, or rickshaw. Exemplifications in the future, though unconscious to the author, would nonetheless be valid (and part of the “meaning” of the text), provided they lay within the boundaries of the text’s transhistorical intention.⁴³ Indeed, such a reading is reflected in the fact that more than a century later, in 1972, in an amendment to the original statute, the *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839 was formally construed as including motor vehicles.⁴⁴

Essentially, in the example of the *Act*, an ideal world was being projected in front of the text (à la Ricoeur) in which no one would be impeding London traffic by repairing broken vehicles on a public street. Hirsch’s transhistorical intention is thus equivalent to Ricoeur’s *world in front of the text*. This was the thrust of the *Act*: to keep London streets free of malfunctioning vehicles that would hinder traffic flow; this is the ideal *world in front of the text*/transhistorical intention. Exemplifications are valid if they are part of this projected world, i.e., if they fall within the boundaries of the transhistorical intention. Thus it is this projected world/transhistorical intention that gives texts their future-directedness. The value of such a concept for biblical interpretation is obvious: the validity of future applications is contingent upon whether such applications fall within the perimeter of the transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*. What is fixed for the future in the past event of writing, then, is the transhistorical concept of deriving any number of future exemplifications for any number of future situations. The ancient text, whether it be legal statute or religious Scripture, fixes the transhistorical intention by means of its original textual intention (“carriage”). The transhistorical intention (“vehicle”) in turn serves as the broad arena within which all valid applications (“car/truck”) must be located. Thus a text projects a world with multiple possibilities for application.

The analogy posited by Ludwig Wittgenstein in this connection is illuminating⁴⁵: He imagines a student being taught to continue a series of numbers

43. Hirsch, “Past Intentions and Present Meanings,” 82–83; idem, *Validity in Interpretation*, 48–51.

44. For the amendment of the *Metropolitan Police Act* 1839, see *Road Traffic Act* 1972 [c. 20], s. 195.

45. *Philosophical Investigations* (2nd ed.; trans. G. E. M. Anscombe; London: Basil Blackwell, 1958), ¶185–87.

begun by the teacher by observing the rule “+2,” the addition of 2 to each successive number in the series (= transhistorical intention). The pupil was guided in creating the sequence up to the number 1000 (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, . . . , 1000 = original textual sense), and then asked to take over without help. Wittgenstein posits the situation where such a pupil then produces the set 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012, etc., imagining (wrongly!) that what the instructor meant by “+2” was that one was to add 2 only up to 1000, but 4 thence to 2000, and 6 thence to 3000, and so on. While it seems quite obvious that the teacher meant/intended for the student to arrive at 1002, 1004, 1006, . . . (= exemplifications), one could ask in what sense this was “meant/intended” by the teacher. Were “1002” and “1004” and “1006” actually thought of by that person? Surely, an infinite series of actual +2 numbers that followed 1000 could not have been conceived of or consciously “meant/intended.” Wittgenstein responds that when the instructor “intended” the sequence of numbers that the student was supposed to come up with, all that was “intended” was that “if I [the instructor] had then been asked what number should be written after 1000, I should have replied ‘1002.’” This “intending” is not necessarily a matter of the teacher actually thinking of the specific numbers “1002, 1004, 1006, . . .,” but of simply being able to generate the sequence of such exemplifications by means of the intended precept involved—the “+2” rule (= transhistorical intention). Thus it is the precept that is actually intended, not the specific and infinite outcomes (= exemplifications) of the employment of that rule.

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Original Textual Sense | Transhistorical Intention (WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT) | Exemplifications |
| 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, . . . , 1000 | +2 rule | 1002, 1004, 1006, . . . , ∞ |

In other words, the instructor’s intention was essentially a transhistorical intention, an ideal world of an infinite sequence of numbers following 1000 that increased in increments of 2. The recognition of this transhistorical intention makes possible the generation of unstated future iterations or exemplifications that are consonant with that rule. Because those exemplifications (1002, 1004, 1006, . . .) abide by the transhistorical intention (the +2 rule), and are part of the projected world of +2 numbers following 1000, those applications are valid. On

the other hand, 1004, 1008, 1012, . . . (as a sequence), or 1005, 1007, 1009 (as individual numbers), do not abide by the transhistorical intention; and not being part of the *world in front of the text*, they are invalid applications.

In sum, the comprehension of the future-directed transhistorical intention of any text makes subsequent exemplifications (valid applications) of that text possible. In light of the fact that the communication intentions of texts such as the Bible or legal literature are future-directed, their “meaning” can, therefore, be said to extend beyond the original textual sense, to the level of transhistorical intention (the projected world), and also to future exemplifications. Exemplifications in the new readerly situation are true to the original textual sense and congruent to it, insofar as they remain within the bounds of the transhistorical intention (as part of the *world in front of the text*).⁴⁶ Thus, many different future exemplifications of a single transhistorical intention can be part of the same meaning. All this to say, for texts intended to be applied in the future, “meaning” must be seen as comprising original textual sense, transhistorical intention (*world in front of the text*), and exemplifications (valid applications).

While the analysis of the *world in front of the text* is tightly linked to the text in question and its particulars, there is a sense in which such a world has a non-semantic nature: it falls in the field of study that language philosophers have labeled “pragmatics.” The next section will explore this critical facet of general hermeneutics that further elucidates the projected world and transhistorical intention. In short, we shall see that the *world in front of the text* (the transhistorical intention) is essentially what authors are *doing* with what they are saying.

Pragmatics: What Authors Do with What They Say

The interpretation of the *world in front of the text*, though constructed upon the semantics of the text (lexical, grammatical, and syntactical elements), is also, in part, a non-semantic operation, properly belonging to the domain of pragmatics—the analysis of what texts (or speakers/authors) *do* with what they say.⁴⁷ Quite frequently in communication, spoken or written, there is a disjunction between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning. The prime example of this disjunction is irony. Suppose that upon seeing a patient in my dermatology

46. In a way, these exemplifications may be considered “identical” to the original textual sense. For this concept of “identity,” see Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 50–51.

47. “The speaker is a *doer*” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 209).

clinic with a few warts on her hand, I remark, “Oh, dear, what shall we do—amputate?” No amount of lexical, grammatical, and syntactical analysis will enable comprehension of my odd utterance. It is only the pragmatics of the utterance, in the context of the entire event (our longstanding patient-physician relationship, the trivial nature of her affliction, the incongruity of dermatologists performing amputations, and my propensity for drama), that will enlighten the listener of my intent: irony.

That does not mean that the semantic elements are unimportant for the pragmatics of the text; on the contrary, they are essential. Semantic analysis may not be sufficient to arrive at the pragmatic meaning, but it is necessary for that move. If one cannot comprehend the semantic sense of “amputate,” the listener will certainly not catch the pragmatic drift of my statement. Semantics is necessary for comprehension, but it is not sufficient, for there is a non-semantic part (i.e., the pragmatic element) to the interpretation of utterances and texts.⁴⁸ This is to emphasize that there is more to understanding what authors are *doing* than just dissecting out the linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements of what authors are saying. It is the non-literal nature of the *doing* that is the business of pragmatics.⁴⁹

In the example provided earlier of the Balinese cockfight, the semantics dealt with the actual action; the pragmatics or the *world in front of the text* pointed to what the whole cockfight theater was about—establishing the machismo of its patrons. Likewise, the Hollywood genre of the western depicts a particular society in the western United States of the late nineteenth century by means of panoramic vistas, horses, outlaws, sheriffs, guns, and the narrative of their interactions (the semantic meaning: what the director was *showing*). These movies implicitly project a world with the themes of individual rights, responsibilities, and codes of honor in the face of evil (the pragmatic meaning: what the director

48. However, I will argue that the pragmatics of a sizable portion of a text (unlike my cryptic one-sentence utterance in clinic)—such as a biblical pericope—can, to a great extent, be determined from that text itself.

49. Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 12, 17; Daniel Vanderveken, “Non-Literal Speech Acts and Conversational Maxims,” in *John Searle and His Critics* (eds. Ernest Lepore and Robert Van Gulick; Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 372. The debate as to what constitutes the line between pragmatics and semantics is ongoing; no doubt, there is a degree of overlap between the two fields. While the semantic and non-semantic/pragmatic transactions of a text are by no means separable, they are discriminable: what the author is *saying*, and what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, can be distinguished. See Stephen C. Levinson, *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000), 9, 168; and François Recanatì, *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1–27.

was *doing* with what he/she was showing). Such pragmatic themes are always facets of implied ethical value, and so the determination of the pragmatics of an utterance is integral to the undertaking of hermeneutics, with the projection of the *world in front of the text* being the essential object of pragmatic analysis.⁵⁰ In terms of the Hirschian triad of meaning, the *world in front of the text* is what the author is *doing* with what he is *saying*. This is the product of pragmatic analysis, and it is this world that yields the transhistorical intention of the text.⁵¹

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| Original Textual Sense <i>or</i> Author's Saying <small>(SEMANTICS OF UTTERANCE)</small> | Transhistorical Intention <small>(WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT)</small> <i>or</i> Author's Doing <small>(PRAGMATICS OF UTTERANCE)</small> | Exemplification |

Without the pragmatic determination of this world (the transhistorical intention), I submit that valid application is impossible. For instance, when *A* tells *B*, “Hey, you are standing on my foot!” the *semantic* meaning (what the author is saying) asserts the spatial location of *B* upon the lower limb of *A*, while the *pragmatic* meaning (what the author is *doing* with what he is saying) is attempting to get *B* to relocate from that traumatic situation upon *A*’s anatomy, even though such a response was not explicitly called for. Rather, the discourse bears a surplus of meaning beyond the literal sense—a pragmatic meaning over and above a semantic meaning. While what *A* was saying simply pointed out the spatial location of *B* upon the lower limb of *A* (equivalent to original textual sense), what *A* was *doing* with what was said was to portray a world where no one would ever be stationed upon *A*’s lower extremities to produce distress. Or to put it differently, the transhistorical intention of the utterance/“text” is this: “I don’t want anyone, anywhere, anytime standing on my foot causing me discomfort!” *A*’s desire was for *B* to be aligned with such an ideal “nobody-ever-standing-on-my-foot-to-cause-me-pain world” by lightening the burden upon *A*’s foot, thus alleviating the latter’s agony (exemplification). Doing so, *B* would conform to the demands of that world, thus “inhabiting” it. In and with the pro-

50. Peter Seitel, “Theorizing Genres – Interpreting Works,” *NLH* 34 (2003): 285–86.

51. For all practical purposes, I am treating these as synonymous: transhistorical intention, *world in front of the text*, author’s *doing* with what he is *saying*, and pragmatics of the utterance.

jection of this world, *A* was actually expressing a transhistorical intention that went beyond merely a current application for *B*, the one directly addressed.

Via the projected ideal world, this intention would be applicable to anybody anywhere—*no one* ever ought to be standing on *A*'s foot causing *A* pain. While the specific application to *B* is, then, an integral element of this *world in front of the text*, and implicit in it, it is obvious that this ideal world governs everyone else (*X*, in the table below) who might potentially consider standing on *A*'s foot at any future time. In other words, as was seen earlier, this projected world/transhistorical intention is the text's (or utterance's) direction for application in the future. It is by the recognition of this referent, the text-projected world, that valid application may be discerned. The elucidation of this world by pragmatic analysis is, therefore, an essential aspect of the interpretation of texts for the purposes of application.

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Original Textual Sense or Author's Saying (SEMANTICS OF UTTERANCE) | Transhistorical Intention (WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT) or Author's Doing (PRAGMATICS OF UTTERANCE) | Exemplification |
| Location of <i>B</i> 's foot | <i>No one on A's foot to cause him pain</i> | Relocation of [<i>X</i>]'s foot |

Nicholas Wolterstorff notes that biblical narrative as a whole would fit in this category: “these stories were being told to make a point,” not just to convey historical detail or cultural information.⁵² As far as interpretation for preaching is concerned, the “point” or thrust of a text is what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying* (the pragmatics of the utterance, or as we have seen, the *world in front of the text*). In response, the people of God derive valid application from grasping that author's *doing*. Authors *do* things with what they say, and therefore interpreters of texts are obliged to discern what was being *done*

52. *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 212–15. I would claim that every act of communication, narrative or otherwise, biblical or otherwise, operates in this fashion. Speakers and authors *do* things with what they say. As another example, the prophet Nathan's narration of a parable in 2 Sam 12 (what he is saying) turns out to be a condemnation of King David (what he is *doing*). Of course, the fact that the author of 2 Sam is, himself, recounting this creates yet another layering: what *this* author is *doing* with what he is saying . . . about what Nathan is *doing* with what he is saying! For the reader, it is actually the *doing* of the author of the biblical text that is critical in the move to application, and that must be privileged.

with what was being said, if they are to generate valid application.

In sum, in any text, an author is always *doing* something with what he/she is saying. This concept is particularly critical for biblical interpretation for preaching, an endeavor geared to accomplish life-change. For such purposes, one must view the biblical text as saying something in order to accomplish some purpose. Without comprehending what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, there can be no valid application. If that earlier statement by *A* regarding the location of *B*'s foot were an inspired utterance, the preacher expositing that "text" would conceivably expatiate on the derivation of the word "foot" from the Old English *foet* from the Latin *pes* from the Greek *pos*; he might discourse upon the foot's musculoskeletal structure (26 bones, 33 joints, over a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments), its vasculature, and its nerve supply; he would, no doubt, wax eloquent about the various abnormalities of that extremity (club foot, flat foot, athlete's foot, rheumatoid foot, etc.); and so on, all the while completely missing the intended valid application of that original utterance. In other words, unless one catches what *A* was *doing* with what he was saying (the pragmatics of the utterance and the *world in front of the text* with its transhistorical intention), valid application of *A*'s utterance is impossible.

Reverting again to our favorite protagonists, if, on another occasion, *A* tells *B*, "The door is open," what *A* intends for *B* to do as a result is entirely dependent upon *B* catching the pragmatics of *A*'s utterance. The discourse is an event, and a lexical-grammatical-syntactical apprehension of *A*'s four-word utterance will get *B* nowhere. The event of discourse must be taken into account: if they have just had a quarrel in *A*'s home, *B* is being told to leave. If they are leaving *B*'s home together, *B* is being reminded to shut the door. If *B* is about to reveal a juicy bit of company gossip to *A* when the former drops into the latter's office, *B* is being asked to refrain from saying anything, at least until the open-door situation is rectified. And so on. What *A* was *doing* with what he was saying is critical to the proper response (valid application) of *B* to *A*'s utterance.⁵³

In other words, a communicative action with *semantic* meaning becomes the carrier for *pragmatic* meaning. The first-order semantic operation is seminal, the seed for the subsequent, second-order pragmatic meaning that is su-

53. The open-door "conversations" were modified from Thomas G. Long, "The Preacher and the Beast: From Apocalyptic Text to Sermon," in *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching* (ed. Richard L. Eslinger; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 7.

pervenient upon the semantic meaning.⁵⁴ All this to say that a right response to an utterance/text (i.e., valid application) is possible *only* by discerning what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, the pragmatics of the utterance—i.e., the *world in front of the text*, the transhistorical intention. This phenomenon, I shall show in chapter 2, is valid for biblical interpretation as well, and especially for interpretation intended to subserve preaching. I shall also demonstrate that for larger chunks of the biblical text (pericopes, i.e., preaching texts of some size), the text itself provides adequate clues as to what the author is *doing* with what has been said.

Ricoeur's projection of a *world in front of the text*, Hirsch's transhistorical intention, and the concept borrowed from pragmatics of what authors *do* with what they *say* (for the purposes of this work, these are synonymous concepts) all attest to the fact that there is more to discourses than is apparent on the surface. There is more to a text than the semantics thereof.⁵⁵ As a function of their pragmatic capability, texts also project worlds with transhistorical intentions, guiding future appropriation and application. The elucidation of such worlds is, therefore, to be an essential transaction of hermeneutics, particularly hermeneutics for preaching, that seeks to culminate in application for life change. It is that pragmatic "surplus" of meaning that generates potential for application, and without this operation of projecting worlds, such application potential will remain unrealized. Therefore, a key task of biblical interpretation that intends

54. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), x, 107; idem, *Divine Discourse*, 212–13. Again, this means that such a *doing* by an author is closely linked to what he/she is saying in the text.

55. The indirect nature of such pragmatic communication may call for extra processing effort on the part of the readers, but this is offset by the advantages of procuring textual effects not otherwise achievable directly. Information theory, according to Levinson, has demonstrated the relative slowness of discourse encoding; he calls the process "a bottleneck" in the system, applicable to both phonetic articulation and alphabetic inscription. This communicational impediment is removed by letting not only the content but also the metalinguistic properties of the utterance (its form, genre, style, etc.) bear some of the speaker's meaning, creating "a way to piggyback meaning on top of meaning." For Levinson, making pragmatic inferences of this sort is more efficient than attempting, by an extended discourse, to encode *all* the "layers" of meaning exclusively in semantic fashion. Correspondingly, from the receiving end of the reader, decoding of such second-order meanings is more efficient if accomplished by pragmatic inference rather than by a meticulous and methodical unpacking of semantic codes (*Presumptive Meanings*, 6, 29). Not to mention the fact that pedantic and cumbersome encoding/decoding of all the nuances of a discourse would ruin the beauty and neuter the power of communication. "The process of interpretation is not a simple matter of decoding. . . . The gap between the encoded meaning of a lexical item and the meaning someone wishes to communicate in an utterance . . . is bridged by an inferential process" (Gene L. Green, "Lexical Pragmatics and Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 50 [2007]: 806). While pragmatics deals with the contextual and inferential aspects of a discourse, it is entirely possible, as will be shown, to discern the pragmatic thrust of a sizeable portion of text from elements of and within that text itself.

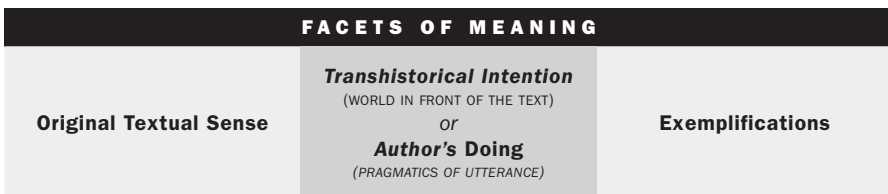
to culminate in application is to unpack the manifold implications of this world and its transhistorical intention, the pragmatic *doing* of authors. How this may be accomplished by the preacher is the burden of this work.

Textuality was designed to overcome the restrictions imposed on orality by time and space. Implicit in the very nature of texts, then, is the splicing of two events—the writing event and the reading event. How is the past of the writing brought into the future of the reading? The bond between the event of inscription and the event of interpretation is consolidated in the transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*. This entity gives direction for future exemplification. What is fixed for the future in the past event of writing is this intention that governs valid application. All applications that fall within the bounds of the transhistorical intention are considered valid and faithful to the text. Thus “meaning” is tripartite, comprising original textual sense, transhistorical intention, and exemplification (valid application). Such a concept and operation are particularly important for the biblical canon: valid application must fall within the limits of the transhistorical intention (the *world in front of the text*). Thus it is the transhistorical intention/projected world that enables the homiletician to navigate from Scripture to sermon with fidelity.

What sort of texts actually project such worlds and what characterizes such world-projecting texts? In the next section, we see that it is those texts that fall into the category of the “classic”—texts that have withstood the dispersion across time and space—that project worlds. Indeed, it might well be that it is by virtue of this very capacity to project worlds that they end up being classics.

The Classic and Its Characteristics

The overlapping concepts of the projected world and its time-transcending intention, as well as those of pragmatics and what authors do (those elements of the center column in the figure below), promote the futurity of the text.



Futurity is thereby built into texts, for texts are intended to be consumed at a time and space distant from the event of the original communication. And

projected worlds with transhistorical intentions (the operation of pragmatics) facilitate this future consumption of texts. It is proposed here that it is primarily those texts that are considered “classics” that exemplify and exhibit this unique characteristic of future utility; the Bible, too, falls into that category and possesses the time-transcending properties of the classic.

Of course, one must choose between texts. Not all are worthy of being read in the future; not all project worlds worthy of habitation; not all have persuasive transhistorical intentions; not all that authors *do* with what they say is worth attending to. In fact, not all the books ever printed are still in print, a likely indication of their future readability and worth (or lack thereof). While it is impossible even to estimate, Google has tried to calculate the number of unique books ever published: 129,864,880 as of August 2010. And it claims that about 56 percent of the books it has online are out of print. Using that estimate as a rough guide, about 65 million of the total number of unique books ever printed are now out of print.⁵⁶ But even from among the survivors there are those that stand out—the classics.

Sandra Schneiders observes that classics have two essential general characteristics: perennial significance and the property of plurality—a surplus of application potential.⁵⁷ To this duo, I will add a third element peculiar to the Bible—prescriptivity, the characteristic stemming from its construal as a divine communiqué by Christians, that renders it authoritative to prescribe the faith and practice of the church. Gadamer declares that “the most important thing about the concept of the classical . . . is the normative sense.”⁵⁸

Perenniality

The abiding nature of the classic indicates the unlimited durability of the work as it imbues its receivers with “a consciousness of something enduring, of

56. Google took its raw data from the Library of Congress, WorldCat, etc. See Leonid Taycher, “Books of the World, Stand up and Be Counted! All 129,864,880 of You,” n.p. [cited June 3, 2012]. Online: <http://booksearch.blogspot.com/2010/08/books-of-world-stand-up-and-be-counted.html>. Also see reports from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, especially Fred von Lohmann, “Google Book Search Settlement: Updating the Numbers, Part 2,” n.p. [cited June 3, 2012]. Online: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2010/02/google-book-search-settlement-updating-numbers-0>.

57. Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation,” *TS* 46 (1982): 64. Tracy makes the same observation, that classic texts “bear a certain permanence and excess of meaning” (David Tracy, “Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion: The Question of Radical Pluralism,” *NLH* 15 [1984]: 296). Also see Michael Levin, “What Makes a Classic in Political Theory?” *Pol. Sci. Q.* 88 (1973): 463, for his five criteria: philosophical quality, original content, influence on events, the foremost example of a certain category of thought, and extended relevancy beyond their own time of publication to the present, even to provide judgments of universal application.

58. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 288.

significance that cannot be lost and which is independent of all the circumstances of time—a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present”; not that it is without the bounds of time, but that it is within the frontiers of *all* time.⁵⁹ The reason for the perennality of Scripture is its unique penetrability: its transcendent referent, the *world in front of the text*, conquering distanciation, deals with matters of critical importance to mankind in every era. Thus this text remains vital and potent across the span of time. The classic demonstrates itself to be perennial, relevant, and material in each new generation, addressing the present as if it were its only audience or readership. And the canonical classic that the Bible is, has amply proven its perennality over the millennia of its reading and application within the community of believers.

As has been detailed, the transhistorical intention/projected world is the pragmatic property of a discourse that gives it futurity. It clues the reader in on what is expected of him/her in the projected ideal world, and what sort of response is sought by the author. Particularly for preaching, this implies that potential for future application is conveyed by the biblical classic. For each specific audience in the future, it is the preacher’s responsibility to translate the transhistorical intention of the sermonic text into specifics relevant for that audience. Or, in other words, it is the burden of the preacher to lead the flock into inhabiting the projected world, in accordance with that world’s precepts, priorities, and practices.

In sum, the perennial characteristic of a classic acknowledges the permanence of the text, granted it by its transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*. However, this intention/world may be actualized in a variety of ways in a variety of circumstances, generating a variety of applications. This brings us to the second characteristic of the classic, its plurality of application potential.

Plurality

Not only is a classic perennial in significance, the world it projects bears “the richness of the ideal meaning which allows for a theoretically unlimited number of actualizations, each being somewhat original and different from others.”⁶⁰ That is to say, the transhistorical intention (what authors *do* with what they say) creates the potential for a plurality of exemplifications. The fact that classics are those texts that transport an excess of meaning (in their plurality) and yet retain

59. Ibid.

60. Schneiders, “The Paschal Imagination,” 64.

a permanence of meaning across time (in their perenniality) is paradoxical on the surface. They appear to be stable in their textual fixity and timeless contemporaneity (perenniality), yet “unstable” in their plurality, as readers in an infinite variety of situations and settings apply those truths in an equally wide variety of ways.⁶¹ Such a conception of simultaneous perenniality and plurality is an essential property of Scripture; its classic status reflects its possession of a surplus of meaning that crosses the bounds of time and goes beyond the needs of any one generation of its readers. And this ensures the Bible’s utility into the future and its continued standing as a classic *sui generis*. As was discussed above, it is the broad compass of the transhistorical intention that makes possible a plurality of exemplifications for the future reader. Provided that these exemplifications are subsumed by the transhistorical intention (or are integral to the projected world), such exemplifications are faithful to the “meaning” of the text. The original textual sense (“carriage”) of the *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839 remains constant; so also does the transhistorical intention (“vehicle”). The latter, however, creates the potential for the generation of a plurality of possible applications (“car,” “truck,” “motorcycle,” etc.).

Consider the example of Eph 5:18—“Do not be drunk with wine.” While this text does not deal exclusively upon drunkenness, for the purpose of illustrating the plurality of meaning, focusing on the word “wine” in this verse will be profitable.⁶² The imperative in that verse demands that one must not be drunk with “wine.” Since only “wine” is expressly men-

61. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 12, 14.

62. Community governance is in view in the latter half of Eph, with guidelines for living embedded in a cascade of contrasts between the dynamics of the “new self” and the “old self” (4:17–5:14). The pericope of 5:15–20 itself contains three contrasts (μή . . . ἀλλὰ, *mē . . . alla*, “not . . . but”): between those who are wise and those who are not (5:15–16), between being foolish and being cognizant of the will of the Lord (5:17), and between being drunk with wine and being filled by the Holy Spirit (5:18–20). Drunkenness is thus paralleled with walking unwisely and being foolish, and is explicitly labeled ἀσώτεια (*asōtia*, “dissipation”), used elsewhere in the NT only in Titus 1:6 (1:7 mentions addiction to wine) and 1 Pet 4:4 (4:3 has drunkenness). Wine, while its use is not condemned in the NT (see 1 Tim 5:23), is clearly not to be abused (3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; 2:3): inebriation is folly, and a characteristic of those who operate in the lifestyle of the old self. Filling by the Spirit, on the other hand, is a characteristic of the wise, those displaying the lifestyle of the new self. In exhorting the Ephesians to be filled by the Spirit rather than be drunk with wine, the biblical writer is essentially commanding them to become, corporately, the unique temple of God, the dwelling place of God in Christ, by the Spirit. Corresponding to the πλήρωμα (*plērōma*, “fullness”) language of the OT that depicted the glory of God in the temple (LXX of Isa 6:1–4; Ezek 10:4; 43:5; 44:4; Hag 2:7; etc.), in Eph the church is the new temple of God serving his presence, where the fullness of Christ dwells (1:23)—the new body comprising both Jews and Gentiles, “a holy temple in the Lord,” “a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (2:19–22; also 3:16–19). See Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 184–87.

tioned in the text, would it be acceptable to be drunk with an alcoholic beverage other than wine, say vodka? Distanciation of the text from the circumstances and culture of the first century C.E., where the only known alcoholic beverage was οἶνος (*oinos*, “wine”), calls for the imperative of Eph 5:18 to be recontextualized in the new circumstances of readers and listeners in order to generate valid application. The transhistorical intention of the text is clearly “all manner of alcoholic drinks,” thus prohibiting drunkenness with vodka, beer, Scotch, or one’s libation *du jour*—the plurality of application. This plurality will include future alcoholic concoctions that are yet to be conceived, compounded, and consumed. The consequences for application are evident: drunkenness with any ethanol-containing brew is proscribed. This transhistorical intention forms the basis for the derivation of plural exemplifications; what the author of Ephesians is *doing* is projecting a world in which the people of God refrain from intoxication with alcoholic beverages of any kind.⁶³

| FACETS OF MEANING | | |
|------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Original Textual Sense | <i>Transhistorical Intention</i> (WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT) or <i>Author’s Doing</i> (PRAGMATICS OF UTTERANCE) | Exemplification |
| wine | <i>all manner of alcoholic drinks</i> | vodka, beer, Scotch, . . . |

In other words, valid application (exemplification) by way of the transhistorical intention/projected world is an integral feature of classics. This is especially so for the greatest classic of them all—the Bible. And its plurality, by virtue of the scope of its transhistorical intentions, enables application in a variety

63. One could hypothetically broaden this transhistorical intention to “all *drugs* capable of rendering one intoxicated,” thereby including as its exemplifications other addictive substances that are ingested, inhaled, or injected. However, in light of the focus of the text on “filling” (a fluid-related phenomenon), and emphasis upon the contrast between the results of Spirit-filling (“speaking . . . , singing . . . , making melody . . .”) and the implied manifestations of wine-filling (Eph 5:19)—likely corresponding vocal expressions that are usually common with the abuse of alcohol—it seems judicious to restrict the transhistorical intention to “alcohol.” There is, no doubt, a degree of interpretive freedom here.

of ways, in a variety of situations, notwithstanding the distanciation in time and space between the writing of the text and the reading of the text.⁶⁴

Prescriptivity

“No serious writer, composer, painter has ever doubted, even in moments of strategic aestheticism, that his work bears on good and evil, on the enhancement or diminution of the sum of humanity in man and the city. . . . A message is being sent; to a purpose”—such works deemed ethically valuable by their creators are intended to be prescriptive.⁶⁵ Whether that prescription is authoritative enough to demand compliance is another matter. However, for Scripture, the community of God’s people holds that this divine discourse that is the Christian canon is prescriptive in a manner that no other classic can ever be.⁶⁶ This prescriptive corpus, the Bible, makes itself binding upon the faith and practice of the community that recognizes it as Scripture and reads it as such. That is precisely why the preaching of the Scriptures with a view to expounding its application is essential for the life of the church.

This is not to assert that the Bible gives Christians individually specific guidance on every potential issue that might confront them in any location and in any age. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall observed about another classic, the U.S. Constitution:

A constitution, to contain an accurate detail of all the subdivisions of which its great powers will admit, and of all the means by which they may be carried into execution, would partake of the prolixity of a legal code, and could scarcely be embraced by the human mind. It would probably never be understood by the public. Its nature, therefore, requires that only its great outlines should be marked, its important objects designated, and the minor ingredients which compose those objects be deduced from the nature of the objects themselves.⁶⁷

64. Though plural, the various exemplifications are related to each other and to the original textual sense, bounded as they all are by the transhistorical intention. One can conceive of other analogies that demonstrate this kind of identity. In my own medical vocation as a dermatologist, a case of psoriasis in one patient differs from cases of the same affliction in others—i.e., there is no explicit identity shared between them; individual manifestations of the disease are variegated and nuanced for each patient, as regards intensity of illness, distribution of lesions, concern to patient, and response to treatment. Yet there is clearly an identity of some sort between all cases of psoriasis, linked as they are by the same “transhistorical” pathophysiology, natural history, complex of symptoms, and therapeutics of the disease that remain constant and subsume every instance of the condition.

65. Steiner, *Real Presences*, 145.

66. The next section, in a description of Rules of Reading for Scripture, outlines the special hermeneutics of this text and considers its unique properties, including its character as divine discourse.

67. *McCulloch v. Maryland*, U.S. 17 (4 Wheat.) (1819): 316, 407.

Likewise, for the Bible to direct every possible twist and turn in the life of every individual Christian and of every community of God in every millennium would be absolutely impossible. Instead a canonical *world in front of the text* is projected, with each pericope of the text portraying a slice of this plenary world, each with its own transhistorical intention.⁶⁸ Such intentions are therefore necessarily generic, capable of being applied in a variety of situations (the plurality discussed above). That the process of interpretation of the text will therefore involve some reduction of its specifics into more general transhistorical intentions is thus inevitable (see chapter 2); these broad intentions may then be appropriately applied to the particular contexts of auditors. With regard to the Bible, this specification of application is the task of the preacher; with regard to the U.S. Constitution, it is the task of the judge. Both preacher and judge bring the transhistorical intention of their respective texts to bear upon the specificities of the lives they deal with, one in the pews and the other before the bar. The prescriptivity of the text is thereby maintained, as original textual sense generates a transhistorical intention which, in turn, generates valid application (exemplification).

In sum, the prescriptive nature of the Bible renders it profitable for application in the life of its readers; its perennial standing projects its relevance across the span of time; its plurality enables a wide variety of valid applications in any number of specific circumstances for a spectrum of discrete audiences in the future. These critical attributes of a classic suggest that for the biblical canon, future-directedness is an intrinsic property of its textuality and its referent (the world it projects/transhistorical intention/what authors *do*). Indeed, it is by means of this futurity that the canon is endowed with a reach that extends beyond the immediate time-space realms of its composition. Such an orientation to the future enables readers to deploy the biblical text for application in circumstances distant from, and dissimilar to, the original contexts of its composition.

“When we read any classic . . . we find that our present horizon is always provoked, sometimes confronted, always transformed by the power exerted by that classic’s claim.”⁶⁹ Perennial and plural in character, the canonical classic of Scripture demands to be read—it is prescriptive. And in the lives of those readers

68. This role of pericopes is discussed in chapter 2.

69. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 134.

volunteering to be challenged by the claims of this text, the Bible brings to bear its transformative properties. The primary task of interpreters of this text, therefore, is to apprehend its truth-claims and illuminate the possibilities for its application in the present, in contexts quite different from that of the author, the writing-event, and that of all prior readers and their reading-events.⁷⁰ In short, the characteristics of the biblical canon with potent repercussions for homiletics and thus, for the life of the Christian community, are its prescriptive nature, its perennial standing, and its plurality of significance.

Excursus: On Significance

In the case of the *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839, the world projected is one wherein traffic on English streets remains unimpeded by disabled vehicles of any kind whatsoever. The law implicitly projected the kind of ideal world it was intending to mandate—a world in which no broken vehicles on London roads would block traffic. The determination of the projected world/transhistorical intention is thus critical in the navigation from text to praxis. Thus my Honda Civic, with its broken radiator, if stranded on a London road, should be immediately removed therefrom without my attempting its extended repair on the roadside (exemplification), lest I be in violation of the aforementioned *Act*—a failure to inhabit the world projected by the text of the law. Proper inhabitation of that ideal world of “no-broken-vehicles-on-London-roads” (transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*) involves the removal of my broken Honda from such roads.⁷¹

Now, if the *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839 were an inspired text and I were preaching the “carriage” pericope, it would be perfectly valid for me to suggest, as a homiletical imperative, that my congregation, in response to the text, should they be stuck on London roads in an incapacitated vehicle, would do well to

70. In this act of transformative reading and hearing, the role of the Holy Spirit must not be underestimated. A proper and fitting reading of this classic emphasizes “both the overruling and redirecting activity of the Spirit in the reader . . . and also the reader’s own invocation of the Spirit.” The reader is to approach this “demanding” text with an appropriate attitude: a faithful hearing exhibits a “self-forgetful reference to the prevenient action and presence of God. . . . the Christian reading is a kind of surrender;” in effect, a prayerful submission to the authority of God’s word, in the power of God’s Spirit (Webster, *Word and Church*, 43, 82–83). Regretfully, the role of the Spirit in interpretation will not be considered in any detail in this work.

71. As was noted earlier, other applications in the future (“truck/motorcycle/etc.”) that fall within the scope of the transhistorical intention of that text (“vehicle”) are also part of the future-directed meaning of the text (“carriage”) and may therefore be deemed *valid* applications. See Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” 207, 210. Also see idem, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 80.

remove forthwith their disabled Toyotas, Fords, Saabs, and Peugeots from the streets. Being the good shepherd of my flock, farsighted and perceptive, I might go further and advise my audience to join The Automobile Association (“The AA,” the U.K. version of American Automobile Association [AAA] in the U.S.), in order to preclude undue delays in getting their stuck vehicles off the road. It is obvious that “Join The AA,” as an application, does not fall within the bounds of the transhistorical intention which simply called for the removal of broken-down vehicles. But in my infinite pastoral wisdom, I called my flock to take the shrewd and sagacious step of subscribing to The AA, so that, should their automobiles be stranded, they would be in a good position to arrange for rapid removal of the offending vehicle from London’s thoroughfares. In other words, the application “Join The AA” is not a *valid* one in response to the *Act* of 1839. Nonetheless, “Join The AA” serves to move one *towards* a valid application: the tow truck dispatched by The AA would help one achieve the goal promulgated by the law.

Applications such as these, which are *not* bounded by the transhistorical intentions, Hirsch labeled “significance”; these latter applications are not part of textual meaning. In our case, “Join The AA” is not mandated by the *Metropolitan Police Act*, but is a means of helping the motorist abide by that law should his or her vehicle break down. This action of subscribing to The AA falls into the category of significance, and is not an exemplification; rather it is a *means of accomplishing* the exemplification of the law—the removal of a crippled car from London’s traffic. Though not directly commanded by the *Act*, this preemptive enrollment enables alignment to that “no-broken-vehicles-on-London-roads” world. The goal, in obedience to the *Act*, would be to inhabit that world of no-broken-vehicles-on-London-roads as quickly as possible and to the best of one’s ability—in this case, by the expeditious removal of one’s distressed automobile from Her Majesty’s asphalt, a task aided by one’s membership in The AA.

| FACETS OF MEANING | | | |
|------------------------|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Original Textual Sense | Transhistorical Intention (WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT) | Exemplification | Significance |
| No carriage repair | No broken vehicles on road | No Honda Civic repair | Join The AA |
| FACETS OF APPLICATION | | | |

Application is thereby split between exemplification (within “meaning”) and significance (outside “meaning”). The utility of significance in preaching is that the preacher need not be restricted to the precise exemplifications of the textual demand, but may also suggest significances for application that move one toward accomplishment of the exemplification demanded by the text. Significances enable one to abide in the *world in front of the text*, aligned to its precepts, priorities, and practices.

Here is another example: The transhistorical intention of Eph 5:18, discussed earlier, prohibits drunkenness with alcohol—an ideal world in which God’s people are never intoxicated with the substance. If the congregation I am preaching to is, for some strange reason, prone to getting drunk on vodka, the immediate application would be to remind them that the biblical text prohibits such inebriation. This application to refrain from vodka-fueled intoxication falls within the transhistorical intention (since vodka is an alcoholic product). But if I am aware that many in the audience are also avid consumers of *Wine Spectator* magazine, and if I suspect that perusing that publication is a prime temptation that leads to their drunkenness on vodka, I could, with my preacherly and pastoral authority, suggest that they cancel their subscriptions to the aforementioned publication. The application “Cancel subscription to *Wine Spectator*” is, of course, not a mandate of the transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text*. However, it is certainly prudent counsel which, if heeded, may help one accomplish the valid application/exemplification not to get drunk with vodka. Such applications that help one move towards achieving the exemplification are significances. They are not “valid” in the strict sense of their being part of the triadic meaning of the text, but they are, nevertheless, applications, and appropriate ones at that, for they help one to arrive at the state (in this case, a state of sobriety) demanded by the text.⁷²

72. Significances might not be “valid” applications, but they are certainly *appropriate* applications, provided they help one accomplish what the text calls for. Significances, therefore, rightly belong in the preacher’s quiver of homiletical arrows. Of course, in practice, the interpreter must first determine valid application before deciding on significances. In the heuristic process, valid application comes first. So for the rest of this work, I will focus on valid applications, but the reader should bear in mind the utility of significances in preaching. It is also obvious from this discussion how important it is for the preacher to know the flock to whom the sermon is directed. In my opinion, preaching can therefore never be separated from shepherding.

| FACETS OF MEANING | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| Original Textual Sense | Transhistorical Intention (WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT) | Exemplification | Significance |
| No drunkenness with wine | No drunkenness with alcohol | No drunkenness with vodka | Cancel subscription to <i>Wine Spectator</i> |
| FACETS OF APPLICATION | | | |

Thus, the validity of an application in a future reading of the text is contingent upon its falling within the boundaries of the transhistorical intention (i.e., within the demands of the text-projected world). This intention/world is an unchanging conceptual component of the text that creates a virtually infinite potential of exemplifications that may be realized in a myriad of future reading contexts. It is this transhistorical entity, the projected world, which gives texts their future-directedness. This work proposes that for biblical pericopes as well, the transhistorical intention/*world in front of the text* is the conceptual entity that enables the generation of future exemplifications, and thereby it mediates a valid move from Scripture to sermon. How this is accomplished for biblical pericopes will be explored in chapter 2.

Section Summary: General Hermeneutics

Texts are instruments of discourse that transcend the boundaries of time and space. In other words, they undergo distanciation. That does not necessarily impact the future potency of a text, for the *world in front of the text*, the transcendent referent of the discourse, bears a transhistorical intention that guides readers situated afar into application. The past of a text is thereby linked to the future of its readers. Such an operation is critical for the canon of Scripture: it is this transhistorical intention of the projected world (the pragmatic consideration of what authors *do* with what they say) that enables preachers to develop valid application for the people of God. Such future directedness is characteristic of “classics,” characterized by their perennial relevance, their plural possibilities of diverse application, and their prescriptivity or normative sense. Indeed, Scripture, by these characteristics, also falls into the category of the classic; this canonical classic has been construed as perennial, plural, and prescriptive by the church for over two millennia.

While the projection of a *world in front of the text* is applicable to all classic texts (a feature of *general* hermeneutics), what gives this concept momentum for biblical interpretation are the unique features of Scripture (*special* hermeneutics, applicable to this unique text alone): its ultimate Author, the singular nature of its divine referent, and its spiritually transforming power. It is the special nature of this hermeneutic, by which the church has recognized the biblical text to be its Scripture, that lends this opus gravity and declares it (and every pericope it contains) worthy of being preached and applied everywhere, to everyone, in every era. The implications of special hermeneutics for the interpretation of Scripture for preaching will be dealt with next.

SPECIAL HERMENEUTICS

The church's construal of the Bible as Scripture and as divine discourse (a special text, indeed) dictates how this classic is to be read for preaching purposes. It is as "Scripture" and all that that designation implies that the canon is rendered applicable, with perennial, plural, and prescriptive standing. Not only the collection as a whole, but individual texts and pericopes as well, bear those characteristics. The canonical classic is thus a text of great consequence, and the world in front of it is a critical referential construct. Scripture is therefore not to be neglected, but read, and its projected world appropriated. It calls for a surrender to the substantiality of the text and to the will of God—a willingness to inhabit the *world in front of the text*. This charge will be spelled out below as a collection of rules for reading, which reflect the perennial, plural, and prescriptive characteristics of this classic *non pareil*: thus, *special* hermeneutics.

Role of Rules

This section will address the employment of special hermeneutics in biblical interpretation by taking an inventory of the rules that have governed the reading and interpretation of Scripture in the age of the church. The rules proposed here, it must be noted, are more like rules of thumb, than like inviolate and unassailable rules of nature. That is, they are more descriptive than prescriptive.⁷³ Rule-creation for the interpretation of the Bible is not a new enterprise: the Jewish rabbis had several sets of these—the seven rules (מִדּוֹת, *middot*) of Hillel

73. See Frederick Schauer, *Playing by the Rules: A Philosophical Examination of Rule-Based Decision-Making in Law and Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 1–3, for a description of the types of rules mankind lives by.