Evangelical Theology, Biblical Archaeology and American Schools of Oriental Research's continuing relevance[1]

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Abstract: The relationship between theologically-centered biblical studies and archaeology has not always been smooth and American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) has often been involved in the debates. While methodological solutions have been regularly discussed, the theological impulses that give rise to the specific readings that archaeologists and historians find so very troubling have received little attention. This paper seeks to make a small contribution to that deficit by articulating the twin theological commitments of Authority and Inspiration and how these shape the conversation from the perspectives of Evangelicals and those utilizing Theological Interpretation. Five modest suggestions for archaeologists' engagement with those theologically committed are offered.

Introduction

Indiana Jones once famously said: 'Archaeology is the search for fact... not truth. If its truth you're looking for, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall.'[2]

Over the past two centuries, Archaeology and the Bible have had a difficult relationship. Numerous treatments of this history have been proffered and the details need not be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say that this relationship – however defined – has been frequently characterized more by the worldview of the participants than anything intrinsic to the *realia* or the texts themselves.

Discussions of the theoretical connection between the work of the archaeologist and that of the confessional biblical scholar tend to be brief and summarized by labels. From the archaeologist and historian we read terms like: 'religious interests,' 'Christian viewpoints,' 'fundamentalist,' or perhaps most dismissive 'theologian.' And from the confessional biblical scholar and theologian we see labels such as: 'liberal,' 'secular,' 'anti-Bible,' and perhaps most pejorative 'academic.' This reductionism often seems to represent a basic misunderstanding of the other's work – archaeologists believe that theologians, searching for an elusive 'truth,' are stuck in post-modern ideological interpretations that eschew solid evidence in favor of biased literary constructs; theologians believe that archaeologists and historians are delusional in their assumption of objective truth and thus are presenting speculative, biased, interpretive reconstructions of the past which are no better than the biblical theological interpretation of the same past.

Theology as Key

Solutions to this impasse have focused almost exclusively on the methodological aspects, specifically how one integrates the results of archaeology and history with the literary text.[3] However, the theological impulses that give rise to the specific readings that archaeologists and historians find so very troubling have received little attention. This paper seeks to make a small contribution to that deficit.

One may rightly ask: 'why should archaeologists of the Near East care about what Bible scholars and theologians think or do?' The short answer points to the inevitable use of our research by Bible scholars and theologians as well as the public. Some years back, Vaughn noted the importance of this connection stating that '...the task of Old Testament theology should be to incorporate [historical imagination] with narrative ... or rhetorical readings.... If we as archaeologists and historians do not undertake such a task, it may be possible to write a history of Israel today, but the resulting history will be ignored by the larger audience that desires a theological payoff' (2004: 385).

More recently, Joffe wrote that '...Biblical Archaeology's subject matter also stands at the center of two, possibly three, world religions. If nothing else, the positive and negative expectations of the public and fellow professionals are strongly shaped by this fact' (Joffe 2010: 328). He went on to note the explosive growth of more conservative Christian groups and their influence on the market for Near Eastern or Biblical Archaeology.

Scholarly debates aside, it is easy to see that popular interest in Near Eastern archaeology continues in large part due to its connections to the Bible. This is illustrated by the continuing popularity of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, various 'Bible and Archaeology' websites and the American Schools of Oriental Research's (ASOR) own demographic data[4]. Since 1900, ASOR has justifiably and rightly broadened its scope; yet it remains an organization whose specific slice of archaeology is inevitably tied to the lands of the Bible – it is not the American Institute of Archaeology, nor is it the American Schools of *East Asian* or *South American* or *Ancient European* Research, but it is not the Near East Archaeology Society (NEAS)[5], either. The fact remains that a significant portion of ASOR's public, both scholarly and lay, is interested in the Bible

and many of these people are interested because they have a theological investment in the texts.[6] For ASOR to maintain its relevance with this public, archaeological presentation and publication should – at some level – demonstrate an understanding of this theological investment.

A second question likewise needs to be addressed: why should archaeologists need to move beyond a methodological discussion of integration and beyond a simple acknowledgment of theological underpinnings. For much of the 20th Century, the archaeology of the Near East and Biblical Archaeology suffered from a lack of intentional theory; the focus was largely methodological. In the latter part of that century theoretical foundations came more to the fore, especially as they related to removing earlier text-based biases and to the lessening of positivism. This has had the effect of distancing archaeological theory from the biblical text and, more strongly, from theological impulses. The theological issues themselves were often portrayed as 'biased' and 'non-scientific;' not necessarily inaccurate but certainly dismissive. Recently, calls for a theory which includes the biblical text as a source for archaeological investigation have been made[7]. While these seldom, if ever, argue that the theology itself should be considered, clearly biblical texts are understood as documents written, edited and understood from a theological standpoint. Discernment of these theological aspects inherent in the texts is necessary to properly utilize them in archaeological or historical work.

Theological investment by modern readers of the Bible is founded on two key theological commitments. First and foremost is that the Bible is 'Authoritative' and second is that the Bible is 'Divinely Inspired.' The exact nature of these two foundational commitments remains variously defined and many adherents cannot actually articulate firm definitions of them, but these commitments are strongly held, at least sub-consciously or in the abstract.

For most Christians, the primary commitment to the Authority of the Bible results in readings that produce meanings that are believed to be somehow theologically prescriptive (or normative) to contemporary life and thought for the reader. The Bible is not simply an ancient text. In other words, while a descriptive (historical or archaeological) explanation of the Bible is perhaps possible, it is of little or no value except to inform a prescriptive reading. This division stems from the Enlightenment.

Prior to the Enlightenment the history within the Bible, especially the Old Testament, was roughly synonymous with the theology; with the latter giving the meaning of the former. The split between the historical and theological study of the Old Testament was famously articulated by Gabler in 1787. As part of a move away from a controlling theological dogmatism combined with a move toward objectivity through empiricism, Gabler argued that the first task of theology should be descriptive and historical, using secular historical methods, and then followed by prescriptive and dogmatic appreciation. This conception of Biblical Studies was strengthened in the work of de Witte who argued in 1807 that although biblical authors 'falsified' their history for religious reasons, the texts are valuable as 'religious history' – a descriptive task where meaning is first found in the history behind the texts. Growing out of this was, on the one hand, the 'History of Religions' school of interpretation which saw theological formulations about events as human attempts to understand the mysterious whether these be in the Bible or any other text. On the other hand, historical research was seen by others – often those having a stronger commitment to the Authority of the Bible – as providing the necessary empirical foundation for the Bible's unique theological and prescriptive articulations.

The second of these commitments – Divine authorship – is coupled with the first but adds a further dimension. This ancient book is authoritative precisely because it is 'God's Word.' God was somehow involved in the production of this book. Obviously there is a broad diversity of opinion regarding 'how' this took place and there are multiple theories of inspiration, but most Christian groups make some articulation of authority and Divine authorship in their confessions and creeds. Three examples will suffice.

At the more conservative end of the spectrum, Article 1 of The *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000) of the Southern Baptists states: 'The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to Man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.'

Similarly the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), in Chapter I, Article IV acknowledges that 'The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.'

The Methodists' *Articles of Religion*, (1784) Article V affirms: 'In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.' This is further defined in the 2006 *United Methodist Member's Handbook:* 'We say that God speaks to us through the Bible, that it's God's Word. This authority derives from three sources: We hold that the writers of the Bible were inspired, that they were filled with God's Spirit as they wrote the truth to the best of their knowledge. We hold that God was at work in the process of canonization, during which only the most faithful and useful books were adopted as Scripture. We hold that the Holy Spirit works today in our thoughtful study of the Scriptures, especially as we study them together, seeking to relate the old words to life's present realities' (Koehler 2006: 80-81).

The twin commitments of authority and inspiration are foundational for most Christians. Vanhoozer connects these basic affirmations to the ongoing interest in the biblical text among academics, arguing that '...biblical studies needs theology in order to provide a sufficient reason for the academy's continued engagement with the biblical text. Only the assumption that these texts say something of unique importance can ultimately justify the depth of the exegete's engagement (Levenson)' (Vanhoozer 2008: 21).

Evangelical Theology

Evangelical Christians[8] and their theological constructs characteristically utilize a modernist western epistemology. Thus, for them, the two theological commitments will naturally produce a logical corollary affirming the truthfulness and/or accuracy of the text. A standard expression of this is found in the 'Short Statement' in the 1978 Chicago Statement on Inerrancy:

> *4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives. 5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.*

In other words, the historical events depicted in the biblical text are, in fact, actual and historically accurate and the meaning ascribed to them by the biblical author is correct. The result of the connection of the twin theological assumptions to a strong concept of inerrancy, founded on a firm western, modernist, empirical epistemology is that the text takes on an unassailable quality. Therefore, if archaeologists and historians provide data or historical reconstructions that are at odds with the biblical narration, it presents more than a hermeneutic inquiry, it is a theological crisis. Here is the big enemy that theologians struggle to combat – a competing narrative arguing for a historically 'incorrect' or 'false' biblical text and/or non-supernatural *meanings* for events. Thus, as the *Chicago Statement* argues, a dismissal of any event as non-historical potentially undermines all theological statements in the Bible. Longman III, speaking of the Exodus, argues: 'If it didn't really happen, there is no substance to the theological/ethical point being made' (Longman III 2009: 86). Sailhamer firmly connects the biblical meaning to the event, stating that 'An evangelical approach to the events recorded in the OT almost surely would employ not only the notion of God's providence in explaining the causes of biblical events but also the knowledge of the events gathered from ancient records and archaeology.... as long as the information is not incompatible [with Scripture]' (Sailhamer 1992: 16, 21). Kaiser and Silva present the case most strongly, affirming that: 'If the Bible is not accurate in the area of the history it portrays, how can it claim to teach truth in other areas such as matters of the soul and eternity?' (Kaiser and Silva 2007: 111).

So, for at least Evangelicals a discussion of 'history' is of necessity a theological discussion. This is essential to understand -- while archaeologists may be making non-religious academic statements, they are often being heard as making theological ones. Evangelicals <u>are</u> willing to dialogue about descriptive historical issues, but only up to a point, even if they are not always consciously aware of this point.

For modernist Evangelical Christians, then, discussions of historical and archaeological material often focus on whether the data presented can be made to cohere with the literature as interpreted within existing theological commitments. The more theologically significant the historical issue, the stronger the effort. The enduring focus on such issues as the Exodus, the Settlement/Conquest, King David and Resurrection illustrate this. Using the rubrics of empirical investigation, external data is judged against the literature – which is usually given priority due to its theological importance.

This priority stems from Evangelical scholars' literary concerns. Consistent with their grammatico-historical exegetical methodology, they tend to focus on the importance of correctly understanding genre in context. However, uneasy with Sternberg's distinction between fiction and falsehood (Sternberg 1985: 23-35) and mindful of their confessional concerns, often 'genre' is understood simply as 'Historical Narrative.'[9] Although considerable nuance is given by some to the ancient literary aspects of historiography,[10] often, at the end of the day, the biblical text is *de facto* assumed to conform to modernist understandings, especially regarding 'accuracy.' The circular nature of this reasoning is apparent: an 'accurate' history in the text grounds the theological statements of the text which ensure the accuracy of the text.[11]

Specifics of data or literature are thus <u>*not*</u> the real issues; rather the theological foundation is what is being debated under the surface. From this theologically-based empirical reasoning have the modernist Apologists come forth – seeking to use science (or philosophy) to prove that scientific observation of the world can be equated with the biblical literary text. At times the underlying theological commitment is seen in the style of argumentation. The common apologetic claim that archaeology has never disproven an event recorded in the Bible is really not much more than a re-statement of the logical difficulty (or impossibility) of proving a negative. When this is coupled with archaeology's relative weakness for 'proving' specific events (except as providing inferred or circumstantial materials), the result – at least superficially – seems heavily weighted toward biblical historical accuracy. This weakness of archaeological results is also utilized on the other end of the modern academic

spectrum; if archaeology cannot prove a (biblical) event beyond a reasonable doubt, then it did not occur.

Herein is the heart of the maximalist/minimalist debate – with both sides (theological and anti-theological) operating within a generally empirical, positivistic sphere. This has led some to see that Historicism (everything is historically conditioned) and Positivism (Cartesian certainty is attainable) are the natural problems with such debate. Van Leeuwen cogently argues that '...for modern liberals, this external standard [historical critique] proved the Bible 'facts' to be wrong, thus freeing them from the truth claims, the authority, and especially the *meaning* of Scripture. For modernist conservatives, who unwittingly accepted the same epistemological and external standards as their liberal foes, it meant a never-ending, rear-guard defensive action of apology, trying to defend the 'inerrant' factuality of the biblical narratives against a growing army of evidence to the contrary' (Van Leeuwin 2011: 149-150).

Text-Centered Literary Evangelical Exegesis

While many Evangelical scholars seek for integration of artifact into text, some have sought Cartesian certainty in a close and perceived objective reading of the literature alone; a reading that coheres to theological commitments. John Sailhamer has been at the forefront of this movement. Interesting in Sailhamer's work is that while he focuses almost exclusively on literary aspects, he remains theologically committed to the absolute modernist historicity of the text. What Sailhamer is unwilling to allow is any modernist discussion of that assertion. In other words the historicity is *essential* but not open for debate. He argues *for* the historicity, he just does not want to have to argue *about* the historicity.

This results in a generally negative view of archaeology as a whole and a rather utilitarian and apologetic use of its results. Sailhamer's belief regarding archaeology as it relates to the literature of the Bible can be seen in his 1998 Zondervan handbook, *Biblical Archaeology*. In this brief work he presents two uses for biblical archaeology which illustrate well his Evangelical theological foundations coupled with his purely literary focus: '(1) Archaeology has produced a wealth of information relating to the world of the Bible...Are such details important for better understanding of the Bible? Some biblical scholars believe they are. We believe, however, that the biblical texts are sufficiently clear to the alert reader of the Bible.... (2) The science of archaeology has helped demonstrate the historical reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible. Before the rise of the study of biblical archaeology, we really had little means for testing the accuracy of the Bible.... In major and minor historical details, the science of archaeology has shown the Bible to be historically accurate' (Sailhamer 1998: 11-12).

Sailhamer's text-centered approach at the same time dismisses moves at two opposite ends of the discussion of historicity. The first is archaeologist G. E. Wright's theological formulation that became known as the Biblical Theology Movement. This was a response against hyper-literary readings which fictionalized the Bible. It sought a more modernist and objective foundation for faith and a strong connection of text to artifact. This theological movement of the mid-20th Century argued that the locus of revelation and thus meaning was to be found in the 'Mighty Acts of God' - the event itself - understood by archaeology and history and interpreted by the literature. Sailhamer, however, like some Evangelicals, argues that the locus of revelation and meaning are to be found in the text only – the text's recounting and interpretation of events is sufficient.

The second move Sailhamer rejects is Hans Frei's argument that the biblical texts are 'history-like' and thus not necessarily articulating actual history. Although Sailhamer agrees with Frei that meaning is not found in event but narrative, he insists in the necessity of the historicity of those events: 'It is not enough to say that the biblical narratives are 'history-like'....The biblical authors...record what actually happened in human history. One can also say today with confidence that the history recorded in these narratives corresponds to the events themselves' (Sailhamer 1992: 16).

While many Evangelicals are in agreement on both of these points, traditionally only a few have been willing to remove questions of historicity from discussion. However, Sailhamer's hyper-literary readings are becoming increasingly popular among Evangelicals who see the more apologetic defense of biblical historicity as an unfruitful avenue. Thus Sailhamer becomes a bridge between traditional Evangelicals who are willing and able to discuss issues of archaeology and history and others not so inclined. These, and others, are increasingly finding themselves in a mode of exegesis known as Theological Interpretation.

Theological Interpretation

While Sailhamer and Evangelicals in general resist Frei's literary turn and its theological result, other, more mainline theologians and biblical scholars have embraced it. As can be readily seen in the literature, the movement in this direction has become progressively more popular and sustained. It is essential to note that these scholars also hold to the twin commitments of Authority and Inspiration, but often articulate them in less strident and modernist fashion. Trier (2008: 36) joyfully exclaims: 'Whatever else it means, theological exegesis deals with the Bible as a word about God and from God, and that makes this movement an exciting project!'

Within the past 25 years this interpretive movement has struggled to define itself. Known as Theological Interpretation (TI), participants usually see their work as the antithesis of the historical-critical paradigm founded in a descriptive understanding of the Bible and theology.[12] This Enlightenment reading, they argue, created two Bibles – the one understood by the church and the one

dissected by academics. In addition, these scholars deny the 'History of Religions' conception that the Bible is simply one of many ancient texts – rather it is a unique book, divinely inspired and authoritative.

Spurred by the work of Barth and Childs, these theologians and biblical scholars have opted for a return to the Bible as a book of and for the church and embrace the concept of Special Hermeneutic - that one must be a person of faith to correctly interpret it.[13]

Although the trend toward TI has been around for several decades, a cohesive definition for the movement has yet to be articulated in spite of numerous synthetic treatments. In 2005, both the *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation* and the initial volume in the Brazos Theological Commentary Series were published and an *Introduction to Theological Interpretation* came out in 2008. Yet, even recently attempts were still being made to formulate a definition in the pages of Eisenbrauns' *Journal of Theological Interpretation* (published since 2007). In spite of this lack of a formally agreed-upon definition, five common features of this important movement may, however, be traced.

A. TI has a strong commitment to the authority of the Bible in the final forms of the texts within its Christian canonical shape and its locus within the Church.

The strong focus on theology for the church was articulated well by Birch, *et al*: 'To claim these texts as scripture is to acknowledge authority in these texts for the ongoing life of the religious community and its individual members.... To read these texts as scripture is to expect such informing and transforming power' (Birch, *et al* 1999: 18).[14]

The Christian (usually Protestant) canon is the authoritative shape for biblical interpretation, with the New Testament often as the focus. This stems from a Biblical Theology that employs 'Christo-centric reading strategies' with 'Jesus Christ as the key to all the Scriptures' (Trier 2008: 47). It is also important to note that some do argue for a distinct theological reading of the Old Testament, while still understanding that 'connections between the two Testaments are made, as they surely must be, from the side of the New Testament' (Brueggemann 1997: 732).

This commitment to a church-based reading leads naturally to the second common feature.

B. The meaning of the text is to be seen as prescriptive rather than descriptive.

The purpose for reading and interpreting the biblical texts should be for the doctrine and/or the edification of the church and faithful –antiquarian, descriptive or even literary interests are tertiary at best; irrelevant or incorrect at worst. This prescriptive and normative treatment rather than a descriptive/historical one is the central dichotomy between archaeology and theological commitment. The move again is away from purely or predominately historical readings.[15]

C. TI seeks to reconnect Biblical Studies to Theology.

Vanhoozer has cogently affirmed the base position on this issue held by proponents of TI. He states that TI seeks to respond to 'the modern schism between biblical studies and theology, and to the postmodern proliferation of 'advocacy' approaches to reading Scripture where each interpretive community does what is right in its own eyes' (Vanhoozer 2008, 17). He maintains that TI is '...governed by the conviction that God speaks in and through the biblical text' (Vanhoozer 2008: 22) and that submission to theological interpretation will 'heal the debilitating breach that all too often prevents biblical scholars and theologians from talking to each other...' (Vanhoozer 2008: 24). The theological aspect always governs the reading as it did prior to the Enlightenment. This illustrates the pre-critical epistemological foundations of TI.

D. Although appearing to be 'Post-Modern', TI actually seeks to be 'Pre-Critical'.

Similar to postmodern thought, TI argues all interpretation is biased, especially subjective and incomplete historical reconstructions. Therefore, one should seek, as best as possible, to understand the bias of the canonical authors and of earlier interpreters within the faith tradition. This is believed to provide the most accurate reading. It is argued that this was the focus and intent of pre-Enlightenment exegetes: 'Precritical readers hypothesized theologically about potential readings, and these readings passed the test if they showed how orthodoxy illuminated the mysteries of the biblical text and the God to whom it points. The concern was not so much to defend theological reading strategies as to deploy them and see how well they worked' (Trier 2008: 45).

This reflects a pre-modern focus on truth determined by persuasion - rather than empirical proofs. TI seeks: '... memorable, searching, and persuasive readings of the biblical text...' (Moberly 2009: 175). These are found through a 'Spiritual reading' utilizing 'typological' and/or 'allegorical' methods - strategies that the Christian laity employs frequently. Others in the movement are more cautious about such readings but remain committed to the basic rationale (cf. Vanhoozer, 2005: 16).

The essential equation of theology to history in a pre-critical reading is fully affirmed by modern adherents. Van Leeuwen notes that 'For the precritical interpreters of the Reformation..., event, biblical narration, and their meaning had simply been one and the same' (Van Leeuwen 2011: 149).

E. Methodologically, the movement is diverse.

Diversity in methodology has been a hallmark of the movement. It has also been one of the main reasons that TI has been unable to articulate a single definition. There are many reasons for this diversity, but perhaps Green states the issue most succinctly: 'As with other forms of 'interested' exegesis ... theological interpretation is marked less by technique and more by certain sensibili-

ties and aims' (Green 2011: 162). This has resulted in a rather utilitarian hermeneutic framework focused on the resultant theology derived.

Vanhoozer has outlined the methodological concerns and the appropriateness of traditional historical-critical methods. Arguing the relative importance of methodology, he concludes that 'The primary concern with the *outcome* of biblical interpretation affords an interesting vantage point from which to assess the relative contribution of various types of biblical criticism and interpretive approaches' (2008: 24).

Regarding the acceptability of modern critical methods, especially those involving historical (and potentially archaeological) materials, Vanhoozer argues that: '... modern and postmodern tools and methods may be usefully employed in theological interpretation to the extent that they are oriented to illumining the text rather than something that lay 'behind' it...Yet each of these disciplines, though ancillary to the project of interpreting the church's Scripture, stops short of a properly theological criticism to the extent that it brackets out a consideration of divine action....Readings that remain on the historical, literary or sociological levels cannot ultimately do justice to what the texts are actually about' (Vanhoozer 2008: 22). Most proponents reject a reliance on historical-critical methodologies since they not only atomize the text but are often antithetical to theological concerns. Vanhoozer himself is comfortable with at least some aspects of historical-critical methods, but the quote above does highlight his disdain for alternative historical and archaeological reconstructions; a suspicion shared by TI in general.

Archaeology and Theological Interpretation

Because of this foundational suspicion, TI advocates have sought for an understanding of exactly how (or *if*) to integrate history and archaeology into their biblical interpretation. Green (2009: 160-163) has argued that there are three basic facets to the way this integration has been approached.

i. Primarily and foundationally, TI rejects any subjective historically-based 'reconstruction of past events in order to narrate the story of the past' (Green 2009: 160). They refuse any alternative and competing historical narrative that seeks to explain everything with naturalistic, as opposed to theological, causality. This is a logical outgrowth from reading the text with a strong theological commitment to Authority and Inspiration coupled with a focus on the prescriptive or normative dimension of the Bible. As Van Leeuwen summarizes: '...the real problem...is this: when a historical critic claims to have reconstructed, interpreted and written 'what really [objectively] happened behind the text,' and then presents that narrative as 'truer' than the profound biblical narratives about reality, then readers have been given stones for bread' (Van Leeuwen 2011: 155). Underscoring the theological dimension, Vanhoozer decries the '... gap between thin (reductionist) descriptions of biblical history and thick descriptions that take into account the text's own appeals to divine agency' (Vanhoozer 2008: 19).

Although theological exegetes eschew historical reconstructions they will usually insist that certain events recorded in the Bible actually occurred in time and space. Yet, like Sailhamer, they simply do not wish to discuss them or the historical accuracy of the biblical record. Their comfort with Frei's 'history-like' literary category has enabled them to dismiss 'historicity' in favor of 'theology.'

Ironically, no matter how well articulated the point is, theological interpreters are still fundamentally wedded to history - especially as it relates to perceived *essential* events such as the resurrection – and thus open themselves to discussions regarding historicity. The question is really not whether history is an issue, but how willing interpreters are to deal with it. It may be seen as somewhat disingenuous to make strong claims for historicity while refusing to allow investigation into them.[16] The declaration that the biblical text is 'pre-modern' and thus should not be investigated with modernist historical tools also misses the point, since these scholars (and laity) are presenting the text as 'accurate historicity' in a modern context that understands such claims from a modernist point of view. One cannot have it both ways.

Clearly advocates of TI like their Evangelical counterparts are fearful of modernist, mechanistic, and mundane explanations for events that will displace the supernatural reality portrayed by the biblical authors, and perhaps this has led them to throw the baby out with the bathwater. As Green avers: ...'within the church we do not depend on even our most talented historians to portray reality for us; rather, in the church, we recognize that those interpretive winds are already tamed by canon and creed' (Green 2011:167).

ii. Green's second facet maintains that many within TI reject exegetical methods that seek to 'explain the process from historical events to their being textualized within the biblical materials' (Green 2011: 161). Thus historical-critical methods - form, source, redaction, etc. –are usable only as rhetorical indicators of the final form of the text. Again this is due to a focus on the inherent subjectivism in these historical methods and the perceived counterproductive results. While Vanhoozer writes that 'Indeed, historical criticism is itself a confessional tradition that begins with a faith in reason's unprejudiced ability to discover truth' (Vanhoozer 2008: 19), he also notes their usefulness to enable the theological exegete to mine 'nuggets' out of the background dirt of the OT (Vanhoozer 2008: 16).[17] Brueggemann is similarly cautious noting that historical-critical methodologies are helpful and even necessary, but that their basic approach 'intends to fend off church authority and protect freedom for the autonomous interpreter' (Brueggemann 2005: 30).

Evangelicals are also wary about the utilization of these methods, and yet traditionally have incorporated some aspects of them in their exegetical programs; seeking to bolster the historical/cultural bases for their grammatico-historical readings.

iii. Green suggests that where there seems the most ground for profitable interaction is in his third facet. He noted that archaeology and history can and should provide insights into the 'historical situation within which the biblical materials were generated' (Green 2010:161). TI does seek the cultural background for the biblical texts and their receiving communities. This is the aspect of archaeological investigation that provides the most data – *realia* informing the *longue durée*.[18] The use of archaeology for background to the text is a major area where TI and Evangelicals are in agreement. However, archaeologists have at times been uncomfortable in this supporting role. In 1988, Brandfon opined that 'Using archaeological evidence to provide context ultimately reduces archaeological research merely to illustrating the Bible stories' (56). This thinking has been echoed in other places, and is a proper caveat when articulating *methodological* foci. However, it remains true that one can never determine how someone else will choose to utilize the results of research. Since many end users of Near Eastern archaeological research are biblically motivated, it seems more productive to *engage* the end user rather than simply to complain about or dismiss him or her.

Suggestions for archaeologists and ASOR in light of these trends

Advocating such engagement does not imply that archaeologists of the Near East become theologians or that ASOR become NEAS. Rather, such informed engagement should incorporate an understanding of theological commitments and would address issues related to both questions of specific historical 'accuracy' and broader contextual concerns. To that end, five modest suggestions here follow.

i. Archaeologists should be aware of the 'marketing' potential of archaeological data to various groups and subgroups – ASOR does have within its broad tent, lay and scholarly, those broadly Evangelical and those utilizing a more Theological Interpretation. Continuing relevance for the organization will depend on this awareness.

ii. Archaeologists should avoid the *a priori* dismissal of theologically-based readings and those who make them; dialogue is necessary and possible. These are people – scholar and lay – who are committed to the same text archaeologists and historians also study. Yet their study is not simply of the 'timeless' and 'meaningful' 'classic' of academia, but rather as a historically based authoritative and divinely inspired document. This is an important distinction – often glossed over by those dismissive of the perceived quaint superstitions or biased readings of the religious.

iii. Archaeologists should be careful to distinguish between data and interpretation in the presentation and publication of results. Interpretation is often important and necessary, but presenting reconstructions based on data is not necessarily the same as the data itself. Of course those interpreting the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament also need to make such distinctions as well.

iv. Archaeologists should understand that a significant group of readers – mainline, evangelical and Roman Catholic – sees archaeologically and historically derived articulations of 'A History of Israel' to be in possible competition with the theological presentation of the story told by the biblical authors. So, if archaeologists focus their presentation and publications to highlight or sensationalize the 'alternative' history, many in the broadly Christian camp may simply not 'be able' to read it.[19]

v. Archaeologists should attempt to engage biblical readers where they are. Evangelicals are very interested in context and are willing to dialogue about historical issues – as far as theological significance and/or confessional limits will allow. Presentation and publication should try and determine when a theological boundary has been reached and employ more specific and targeted discussion beyond that point. Theological Interpreters, while not interested in historical discussions *per se*, *do* seek clarification of the context of the text through archaeological research and archaeologists can have a great impact in this area.

By engaging with theologically committed readers more intentionally, Near Eastern archaeology and ASOR can add valuable insight into the discussion of 'meaning' in the texts. Archaeologists must be realistic regarding the levels at which this can take place; the focus is not on content so much as on formulation and presentation. Perhaps the call is for archaeologists to nuance with integrity and be cautious about sensationalism. In the end, archaeologists may even have something to say regarding the 'truth' about which Indiana Jones was so wary of teaching.

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Endnotes

1 A shorter version of this paper was originally presented at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) in Chicago.

2 Although spoken by Harrison Ford, who may have added the name Tyree as an homage to Ford's own philosophy professor (see Brad Duke, *Harrison Ford: The Films*: 159), writing credit for the script of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (LucasFilm & Paramount,1989) is given to Jeffery Boam.

3 Fine recent examples include Levy 2010, Hoffmeier and Millard 2004 and Moreland 2003.

4 Although some of the ASOR demographic data is currently anecdotal, the trends do indicate that over a third of ASOR members are also members of the Society of Biblical Literature. A similar percentage of Institutional Members are biblically-oriented or ministerial schools. The percentage of non-academic (lay) ASOR members that connect to ASOR because of a biblical interest appears to be much larger.

5 Members must agree to a confessional statement affirming the inspiration of Scripture.

6 Of course there are those who are not in any way theologically motivated who are engaged in archaeology of the Near East, or whose theological concerns are not from a Christian perspective; this paper is focused instead on those who do have a Christian background.

7 See especially, T. W. Davis 2004 and A. Meier 2010.

8 The 'broad-brush' approach in what follows does not dismiss the diversity among Evangelicals; instead the grouping seeks to focus on what is most common among the various stripes of Evangelicals, especially those from North America.

9 Often understood simply as chronological and realistic narratives depicting past events – with both artistry and accuracy. It is in the assumption and definition of accuracy that the historiographic issues are manifest.

While some have argued that 'accurate' should be understood in terms of successful communication of ancient authorial intent (cf. Provan, Long and Longman III 2003: 87-88), others insist that 'accuracy' be defined according to the degree of exactness to the actual event itself, especially when used in modern discussions.

10 See, for example, Howard 1993, Long 1994 and Provan, Long and Longman III 2003.

11 To be sure, the argument may be made that this is not circular but rather confirmatory, but given that it is the accuracy of the history which is being discussed and the theology is open to interpretation, it is difficult to know what is confirming what.

12 For example, Moberly has argued that Gabler's division was proper for his time but newer nuances make that break no longer viable (Moberly 2009: 175).

13 J. Pelikan has noted cogently that from AD 100-600, bishops were the standard interpreters, and it was the monks between AD 600-1500, but from AD 1500 to the present it is (secular) university professors, (Pelikan 1971: 5).

14 Note the preposition "in these texts" rather than "of these texts" – a different understanding of inspiration and authority than more conservative counterparts.

15 But, as Vanhoozer (2005: 16) insists, it "is not an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text" except the grid of the "Rule of Faith."

16 Perhaps this is the basis for many dismissive statements by archaeologists and historians.

17 This is a common dogmatic / systematic theology foundation for the hermeneutic task.

18 Precise archaeological evidence for specific events is usually elusive, especially as it relates to the more local and small-scale events depicted in the Bible.

19 Note the letters to the editor in *Biblical Archaeology Review*.