Abstract

In this keynote address at the 2012 Interdisciplinary Colloquium, held at McKenna Chapel on the Kentucky Campus of Asbury Theological Seminary, October 12, 2012, David Bauer examines the history and development of inductive biblical study within its English-speaking environment. In addition, he proposes ways in which this approach can be understood in postcolonial environments as a way to open the methodology of Inductive Bible Study to a larger global audience.

Keywords: Inductive Bible Study, methodology, history, development, postcolonial

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The invitation to deliver the keynote address at the 2012 Interdisciplinary Colloquium is a singular honor and an exciting opportunity for me. I want to thank Dr. Pachuau for suggesting that we devote this Interdisciplinary Colloquium to the issue of inductive Bible study. Its long history and continuing prominence at Asbury Theological Seminary, and its broad dissemination throughout the world, led Dr. Pachuau to propose this topic as the focus of this Colloquium; and as a practitioner of inductive biblical study I am grateful. I am especially pleased that this Colloquium deals with inductive biblical study in global contextualized perspective. As we shall see, inductive biblical study was developed initially by persons within the western educational tradition, although it has been taken up and practiced and indeed enthusiastically embraced by many teachers and leaders in the Church throughout the Majority World. The issue of its usability and adaptability in the non-western world is of paramount importance; and indeed many of the considerations concerning trans-cultural usefulness will be pertinent to western exegetical methods in general and not solely to inductive biblical study.

I am gratified, too, and humbled, to address you this morning on a subject that is not only important to me but is, I believe, my calling. I first encountered inductive biblical study in my undergraduate program at Spring Arbor College (now University). And during my course work at Asbury Theological Seminary I came increasingly to believe that this approach offers an avenue for the study of the Bible that is compelling on a number of levels: It is built upon well-considered hermeneutical principles; it attends to the process of human learning and understanding and thus seeks to be responsive to sound educational insights; it provides a general framework into which virtually all methods and aspects of biblical interpretation and appropriation can be effectively incorporated; it offers a full, rich, and fruitful engagement with the biblical text; and it is appropriately tentative, inviting methodological criticism, correction, and enhancement.

A significant advantage of this approach, and perhaps an argument for its hermeneutical validity, is that although one can practice it in a simplified form at the lay level one may also employ it in the most sophisticated and academically demanding biblical scholarship. Indeed, perhaps most people in the Church associate inductive Bible study with its lay-oriented forms or identify it with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which uses inductive Bible study as the basis for all of its discipleship training and development. Some persons are perhaps unaware that over the years it has been a significant part of the instruction at such institutions as Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, the Associated Mennonite Theological Seminaries, Regent College (Vancouver), Fuller Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary, Eastern Mennonite Theological Seminary, Pittsburg Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, Regent.
University, and Azusa Pacific University, to name only a few and to say nothing of the hundreds of colleges, universities, and seminaries in the Majority World that make use of inductive biblical study for ministerial preparation. Perhaps some persons do not know that inductive biblical study has profoundly influenced the work of several leading biblical scholars of global reputation, including Brevard Childs, Patrick D. Miller, Jr., James Luther Mays, Thomas W. Gillespie, and Daniel Fuller, again to mention but a few. Many of our own Asbury Seminary graduates who have pursued postgraduate degrees in Bible have testified to the direct value of inductive biblical study in their doctoral work.

Actually, I have known inductive biblical study only in its more rigorous, academic form. In fact, a large part of the appeal that inductive biblical study has always held for me is that it is intellectually demanding and academically challenging. Both the depth and breadth of inductive biblical study require much mental energy on the part of anyone who pursues it thoroughly. The reason: Through this study one can always find much more to discover in the biblical text in terms of profundity and range.

Since this Colloquium addresses inductive biblical study in global contextualized perspective, and since some of you may be unfamiliar with the inductive study of the Bible, the purpose of this first paper of the day is to provide a history and description of inductive biblical study, concluding with some thoughts on the relationship between inductive biblical study and one of the most prominent emerging methods of biblical engagement in the Majority World, postcolonial interpretation.

History of Inductive Biblical Study

Although the “inductive biblical study movement” emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, inductive biblical study has precursors that extend back to the church’s study of the Scriptures from the very beginning. Inductive biblical study adopts certain reading strategies that go back to the early Church. Indeed, no one particular thing sets inductive Bible study apart from the study of the Bible as it has been conducted by many intelligent laypersons, ministers, and biblical scholars (“exegetes”) around the world. For example, inductive Bible study shares with responsible exegesis everywhere a concern for literary context, and for the precise meaning of biblical terms derived through proper word study. The distinctiveness of inductive Bible study involves its specific and purposeful attempts to maintain radical openness to the meaning of the biblical text wherever the evidence may lead, its various methodological emphases, and the intentional way in which it seeks to relate the multiple components of Bible study to one another, so as to provide an effective framework for the study of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, it is true that inductive biblical study traces its origins more specifically to the work of
William Rainey Harper and especially his student and associate Wilbert Webster White. The role of W. W. White is in the end more enduring because in founding The Biblical Seminary in New York, which became the center of inductive biblical study, he gave this inductive study an institutional base from which it spread throughout the world.¹

W. W. White was born in Wooster, Ohio, in 1863, into a pious Presbyterian family. He graduated from the College of Wooster with distinction in 1883; and upon his graduation from Xenia Theological Seminary in 1885 he served pastorates in the United Presbyterian Church. While a seminary student White took summer school classes at Morgan Park Theological Seminary, where he came under the instruction of William Rainey Harper, then a professor of Old Testament at Yale University and also the founding president of the University of Chicago. Harper had graduated from Muskingham College in Ohio at the age of fourteen and earned his doctorate at Yale when he was only eighteen. Harper was most impressed with White’s intellectual gifts and persuaded him to leave the pastorate for the pursuit of doctoral studies in Semitic languages at Yale University, with a view toward his eventually becoming a professor of Old Testament.

Through a number of influences at Yale White became interested in exploring the process of learning, that is, educational method. Later, White and the seminary he founded would develop a fruitful relationship with the great teacher and educational theorist from New York University, Herman Harrell Horne. During this Yale period, too, White became convinced of the significance of relationship; he came to see that the key to understanding anything is to consider its major components and the ways in which these components relate to one another. Later, White would require his students to read John Ruskin’s classic *Essay on Composition;²* in which Ruskin presented a taxonomy of relationships found in nature and in all forms of art; and he would require his students to analyze biblical books and passages according to certain “laws” or patterns of relationships, e.g., contrast, comparison, climax. White referred to this emphasis on relationships as the principle of *composition.*³ Actually, White’s understanding of *composition* was twofold. White embraced a general compositional theory, insisting that all things in the world cohere so that the study of all things in the world is bound together in a grand network of truth. One can enter this network at any point and eventually, under ideal circumstances (which, of course, never actually exist), encounter all truth in the world. Thus the study of the Bible leads to truth in all areas; and conversely, truth in all other areas relates, either directly or indirectly, to the study of the Bible. But White also adopted a specific compositional theory according to which individual books of the Bible cohere; thus everything within a biblical book is related directly or indirectly, to everything else within that book. As he liked to say, “Things hook and eye together.”⁴ In fact, one
might add that White adopted a kind of intermediate compositional theory, viewing the whole of the canon as a unity according to which individual books and passages are to be understood. But White always began with the unity of the biblical book, and gave greatest emphasis to book coherence.

Under Harper W. W. White encountered higher-critical study of the Bible. In fact, Harper’s critical views, particularly on the dating and authorship of the Pentateuch, were met with suspicion by many of his fellow Baptists. White was not convinced of Harper’s views regarding some of these issues. But Harper acknowledged the limits of this critical study of the Bible. And White appreciated Harper’s recognition that the study of the Bible must not be reduced to matters of authorship or sources, but rather that the study of the Bible must finally center on a theologically sensitive, and indeed theologically oriented, literary analysis of the final form of the text, that is, the books of the Bible as we have them. Although White tended to be more conservative, and certainly more cautious, on higher-critical matters than Harper, White never rejected higher criticism out of hand. In fact, he developed close relationships with several leading critical scholars of the time, such as Adolf Deissmann; and indeed White would invite many of them to lecture or teach at the seminary he would found. Still, White never completely worked out the precise relationship between the historical conclusions derived from what most evangelical scholars might consider appropriate or reliable higher-critical study on the one hand and the study of the text in its final form on the other. That task would be taken up by some of his successors.

White was also influenced by Harper’s insistence that, generally speaking, there should be an emphasis upon the study of the Bible in the student’s own language. Harper recognized that people think in their native language and that consequently students should be saturated with the Bible in their own tongue. Indeed, Harper and White believed that the excitement that comes from the study of the Bible in the vernacular would lead students to pursue enthusiastically the original languages. Thus, as White was struggling with Harper’s presentation of higher-critical views he also encountered through Harper “the method of the study of the Bible by books in the mother tongue,” as he would later put it. Harper suggested that the study of the English Bible (for English-speaking students) should constitute one-half of the seminary curriculum. In a survey Harper conducted in 1886-1887 he found that 888 of 1000 pastors said that the greatest lack in their seminary training was in the English Bible. This emphasis upon the study of the Bible in the vernacular was reflected in the fact that, later, courses in inductive biblical study were often labeled “English Bible” classes (for example, at The Biblical Seminary and for a time at Asbury Theological Seminary). But one must remember that both Harper and White were trained Semitists; and it is significant that in the curriculum of the seminary White founded, The Biblical
Seminary in New York, Greek or Hebrew was required in every semester of the program. Their convictions regarding the role of both vernacular translation and original languages were nuanced, balanced, and actually quite sophisticated.

Both Harper and White believed that the suspicions or doubts regarding the Bible that emerged from higher-critical study could be adequately addressed by the direct literary study of the Bible. They believed that as the student encountered the message of the Bible by examining the Bible book-by-book the student would experience the compelling force and authenticity of the Bible. In the process of pursuing its proper study, readers would find that the Bible authenticates itself. Thus, in his classes, Harper combined detailed critical study of minute points with the synthetic (i.e., holistic) study of whole books or groups of books in the mother tongue. This conviction that the Bible authenticates itself through direct study involved an (usually implicit) appeal to the witness of the Holy Spirit as one encounters God's own revelation in the Scriptures. White referred to this self-authenticating function as the “apologetic by-product of direct contact with the Bible itself.”

Although Harper and White were correct as far as they went in this regard, they failed to see the necessity of addressing methodologically the relationship between certain higher-critical conclusions on the one hand and the claims of Scripture and the Bible's inspiration and reliability on the other (and, for that matter, the proper role of apologetics). Later certain scholars in the inductive biblical study movement would attempt to address this deficiency.

Upon earning his Ph.D. in Semitics from Yale University White joined the faculty of Xenia Seminary. But White, influenced as he had been by Harper, felt constrained by what he considered the stilted, doctrinaire character of this traditional “old-line” denominational seminary. According to White, at Xenia a deductive approach was practiced, in which students were spoon-fed information and told what to think over against an inductive approach that would give students the resources and encouragement to discover truth, and especially biblical truth, for themselves. While teaching at Xenia White continued Harper's practice of giving over a portion of his instruction in courses in Hebrew and Old Testament literature to the study of larger swaths of the English Bible. During his years of teaching at Xenia, White was also exposed to Andrew Murray's book, With Christ in the School of Prayer. Out of that encounter White experienced a deeper level of spiritual intimacy with Christ. White became convinced that seminary education must not only center on the study of the Bible, but through the study of the Bible it must also facilitate authentic spiritual formation.

White's disillusionment with traditional seminary education such as he experienced at Xenia led him to leave Xenia to accept an invitation from Dwight Moody to teach at Moody's recently inaugurated Bible college in Chicago. There White came to appreciate the value of an interdenominational
learning environment. But White chafed under what he considered to be a lack of intellectual rigor and a superficial spirituality. He became convinced that a great need existed for a new type of seminary, one that would serve as an alternative to the traditional seminary in that it would offer curricular coherence around the centrality of an inductive study of the Bible, and an alternative also to the Bible colleges which, at least at that time, were characterized by obscurantism and academic weakness.

It was during this period that his brother, J. Campbell White, on behalf of the International Committee of the YMCA, invited Wilbert W. White to go with him to work among college students in Calcutta, India. There White became convinced of the need, also in India, for knowledge of the Bible and for right method to study and teach it. White taught at United Presbyterian mission stations throughout India; and he held fourteen conventions attended by missionaries and college students from all over India. Missionaries and Indian students alike were gripped by White's studies and expressed the need for an emphasis on the direct study of the Bible and a method that would make such study fruitful.

On his return trip White stopped in England, where he presented Bible studies for the YWCA in London. When he came back to England the next year (1899) he taught over 12,000 people in his ten-week Bible studies in London. He returned for a third series of meetings in March 1900, when he gave studies in England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. At this time White presented a plan to Lord Overtoun for a school modeled on the Teacher's College at Columbia University, but with a Bible-centered curriculum. Overtoun gave White 500 pounds to establish such a school in America, with the hope that White would found a similar school in London. The hope of a London school was never realized. But the American school would become The Biblical Seminary in New York.

On January 8, 1901 classes began at the “Bible Teachers College” in Montclair, New Jersey. The school moved to Manhattan in 1902; and in 1921 the name was changed to The Biblical Seminary in New York. The seminary was fully accredited to offer a range of degrees, included the Bachelor of Sacred Theology (S.T.B.), Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.), and Doctor of Sacred Theology (S.T.D.). The purpose of the school was “to make the study of the Bible in the mother tongue the organizing, dominating element in a school of preparation for Christian leadership.” It was established out of the conviction that “the ministry must be a biblicocracy, that it must know its Bible better than any other book,” a quote from P. T. Forsyth. The school was to insist that the Scripture itself must be allowed to establish its own criteria both as to its interpretation and its authority. The seminary reflected the emphases of Wilbert W. White: (1) a bible-centric curriculum around the inductive study of the Bible; (2) concern for effective educational principles and practices to
facilitate the student’s own learning; (3) commitment to the devotional life of prayer toward spiritual maturity; (4) a cosmopolitan, global perspective (and hence New York City as the choice of location); and (5) commitment to evangelical Christianity and especially the authority of the Scriptures.

The Biblical Seminary flourished under the presidency of Wilbert W. White, who died in 1944, and his immediate successors. Inductive biblical study was developed and enhanced there through such teachers as Howard Tillman Kuist, who later taught at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and was for twenty years the Charles T. Haley Professor of Biblical Theology for the Teaching of English Bible at Princeton Theological Seminary; Donald G. Miller, a scholar whose expertise spanned biblical studies, theology, and preaching, who also went on to teach at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and to serve as president of Pittsburg Theological Seminary. From this center, inductive biblical study spread to hundreds of colleges, universities, and seminaries around the world, including Asbury Theological Seminary.

Inductive Bible study came to Asbury Seminary in 1940 with the appointment of Dr. Kenneth Plank Wesche, a graduate of The Biblical Seminary in New York. Inductive biblical study gained definition and prominence when Dr. George Allen Turner joined the faculty in 1945. Turner was also a graduate of The Biblical Seminary, where he had studied under W. W. White and other leaders of the inductive Bible study movement, and had recently completed his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies at Harvard University. With Turner, inductive Bible study became a Department (called at that time “English Bible”) within the Division of Biblical Studies; and inductive Bible study courses were required of all students. Turner possessed a powerful intellect and profoundly influenced generations of students.

But perhaps the most significant development in inductive biblical study at Asbury Seminary was the appointment of Dr. Robert A. Traina as Professor of Biblical Studies in 1966. Traina was a graduate of The Biblical Seminary and had served on the faculty of that institution for almost 20 years before coming to Asbury. Moreover, in 1952 he had published Methodical Bible Study,¹² the most authoritative work on inductive Bible study to be produced up to that point. Like Kuist, Miller, and several others before him, Traina did much to relate inductive Bible study to mainstream exegesis and to biblical theology. He was a brilliant thinker, a skilled interpreter, and superior teacher who combined intellectual rigor with spiritual power. The Department of Inductive Biblical Studies currently includes six faculty members and additional adjuncts. And the Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies is just now being inaugurated in conjunction with the seminary’s First Fruits project. Thus, though it continues to be taught around the world, inductive Bible study as a serious academic discipline is associated most closely with Asbury Theological Seminary, which in some ways continues the tradition of The Biblical Seminary in New York.
York. In fact, Asbury Seminary may be considered the world center of inductive biblical study.

**Character of Inductive Biblical Study**

As we come to the discussion of the character of inductive biblical study it is appropriate to mention that quite naturally some methodological variation exists among the practitioners of inductive study. Nevertheless, for the most part the description I am about to offer stands in continuity with the thinking of the original leaders of the inductive biblical study movement, and for that matter with the majority of those who presently teach inductive biblical study in academic settings. At times I will make explicit what has been only implicit in the work of those who have practiced inductive biblical study over the years, for they have not always been as hermeneutically transparent as I have tried to be. Naturally, the mode of conceptualization and certain of the emphases are mine.

The terms “inductive” or “induction” are of course used in a variety of ways; and therefore clarification of the basic nomenclature is necessary. We have included in the book *Inductive Bible Study* an appendix in which we explore in some detail the three major ways philosophers talk about induction/deduction. I will mention here that we use “inductive” as practically synonymous with “evidential,” and “deductive” as practically equivalent to “presuppositional.” As applied to biblical study, “inductive” involves a movement from the examination (or observation) of the evidence in and surrounding the biblical text to tentative conclusions regarding the text, whereas “deductive” involves a movement from presuppositions or assumptions to conclusions about the text. We judge that the study of the Bible calls for an inductive approach, since the fundamental reality of our experience of reading, including our reading of the Bible, is that of being addressed, of receiving communication from another. The message of the Bible does not reside inherently within us. The meaning of the Bible is not something that we properly bring to it, only to read it out again. To do so would amount to ventriloquism, not interpretation. Although the message of the Scriptures may very well connect with us in profound ways (a process which, according to the Bible itself, the Holy Spirit facilitates), still it comes to us from the o(Other). We are therefore called upon to hear it on its own terms, and to give proper space to its other-ness.

Accordingly, “induction” refers both to an attitude of radical openness to the message of the Bible as presented on its own terms, and to a process that emerges from and expresses that attitude. The “inductive attitude” is a commitment to radical openness to the evidence wherever the evidence might lead. This inductive attitude has a number of practical ramifications. I will mention two.
The inductive attitude has ramifications, first, in terms of the thinking process we employ for realizing the sense of the text, in that the inductive attitude leads to an inductive model of inferential reasoning over against a deductive model of inferential reasoning. It is important to understand that all attempts by anyone to realize the sense of the text involve inferential reasoning, i.e., the movement from one or more premises to inferences or conclusions. This is the universal reality, whether one is speaking of a Yale professor or a Ugandan layperson (who, by the way, may have better insight at points into the sense of the text than the Ivy-league professor). They may employ different types of premises; and one or both of these persons may not be fully conscious that they are engaging in an inferential process. The Ugandan layperson may not think of what he is doing as a logical project. But logic is always involved, although it may not be in every way a style of logic familiar to most western intellectuals. Inferential reasoning is occurring nonetheless. The operative issue is whether the reasoning is inductive, which means that the premises are evidential (i.e., arise from true observations of relevant realities), thus leading to inductive inferences or conclusions, or whether the reasoning is deductive, which means that the premises are presuppositional (i.e., expressions of untested or unexamined assumptions), thus leading to deductive inferences or conclusions.

So an inductive attitude has ramifications for the thinking process in biblical interpretation, leading us to adopt an inductive inferential model. But it also has ramifications for our orientation towards the Bible. Our orientation, or approach, to the Bible and its study should correspond to the biblical text in all of its aspects. As we think about how we approach the Bible we must attend to the operative issues of the nature of the Bible, the nature of the reader(s) and the reading process; and the relationship between the Bible and the reader. Given the nature of the Bible, the nature of the reader(s) and the reading process, and the relationship between the two, how should we pursue the study of the biblical text? We must avoid reductionism here, and attend rather to the full range of these realities. For example, when we speak of the “nature of the Bible” we refer not just ontologically to the character of the text itself (although that is certainly involved), but also functionally to its role as canonical Scripture within the Christian community of faith. As I shall mention below, this function is essential to the very notion of “Bible.” And when we speak of the “nature of the reader(s) and the reading process,” we recognize both the universal cognitive and epistemological realities that we all share and the fact that variations exist on the basis of the different cultural/psychological/theological experiences of readers. The main point is this: The Bible in all of its ontological, interpretative and relational aspects should determine how we approach and how we study it. I turn now to some of the chief convictions that those in the inductive biblical study movement
have derived from their understanding of the Bible in all these aspects of its existence. I present these convictions as a series of dyads, reflecting an attempt to respect the comprehensive character of the Bible's realities and a resistance to the tendency to adopt a one-sided either-or approach.

The first conviction is that the study of the Bible involves both objective and subjective aspects. We have dubbed this inclusive objective/subjective matrix a “transjective” model. Perhaps the greatest issue in hermeneutics generally, and particularly in biblical hermeneutics, over the past half century has been the objective/subjective debate. Is it appropriate to approach the biblical text with detached objectivity, being careful to exclude completely our personal and communal experiences and background from the hermeneutical process? Or should we abandon entirely this attempt at objectivity and insist, along with Northrup Frye, for example, that interpretation is like a picnic to which readers bring their own meaning? The first option corresponds basically to naïve realism, and reflects the Enlightenment insistence that true knowledge must involve scientific objectivity. The second option, found, for example, in some extreme forms of “reader-response criticism,” represents existentialism, sometimes referred to as “phenomenalism.” This view is often associated with post-modernity. Yet existentialism arose within modernity as a reaction against the privileging of objectivity by the Enlightenment. And it is misleading to suggest that this present period is exclusively “post-modern” in terms of affirming phenomenalism; a pursuit of pure objectivity continues to be embraced by many in today’s world.

It is true that inductive biblical study is concerned to hear the text on its own terms and is thus resistant to reading our own assumptions, experiences, and concerns into the text in such a way that these would keep us from hearing the text in its otherness. This would seem to point to an objective emphasis. Some early leaders in the inductive biblical study movement boasted that this approach corresponded to “scientific method,” presumably drawing on the connection between induction and the natural sciences. Yet I suspect that the real basis for this concern for the objective meaning of the text is the issue of transcendence, the notion that in the Scriptures God speaks to us from God’s own perspective, one that is not only distinct but also different from that of humans in their creatureliness and their sinfulness. But the ways in which inductive Bible study was actually taught, say at The Biblical Seminary in New York, emphasized students’ personal existential engagement with the text. Nevertheless, at its beginning, inductive biblical study tended to reflect the attitude of western exegesis in general that the text was to be viewed as an object to be examined and analyzed with detachment so that it may be protected from the subjective intrusions of the reader.

This is an area in which inductive biblical study, at least as taught by many of us, has undergone modification. Hermeneutical reflection and the
emergence of reader-oriented approaches have made us sensitive to the fact that biblical study involves not only the text but also the reader as subject. The insights of Gadamer, especially as adopted by Thiselton, regarding the “two horizons,” and the specific ways in which the “horizon of the text” intersects with the “horizon of the reader” have proved significant for biblical hermeneutics in general and for many of us in inductive biblical studies in particular. Actually, we have found that the development of our thinking about the subjective/objective matrix is well reflected in “critical realism,” a philosophical and literary movement described by N. T. Wright as follows:

a way of describing the process of “knowing” that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence “realism”), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialog or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence “critical”). This path leads to critical reflection on the products of our enquiry into “reality,” so that our assertions about “reality” acknowledge their own provisionality. Knowledge, in other words, although in principle concerning realities independent of the knower, is never itself independent of the knower.

Thus, rather than objective and subjective elements standing in tension with each other, they actually work together in such a way that the key to understanding the (objective) message of the text is precisely through attending to our subjective involvement.

The second conviction is that biblical study must be both individual and communal. To begin with the individual: A concern exists for both individual encounter and individual conclusions. When we consider individual encounter with the text, we recognize that in a sense each of us as individuals stands before the Word of God that we encounter in the Scripture. Accordingly, both the OT (e.g., Pentateuchal commands) and the NT deal not solely with the community but often focus upon the individual. John 3:16 declares not only “God so loved the world,” but also that “everyone [singular] who believes in him should not perish.” And Jesus insists, “the Son of Man shall repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt. 16:28). And Paul declares, “It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone…so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). This individual attention within the Bible, among other things, warrants individual encounter with the text.

In addition to individual conclusions, we must also acknowledge an individual aspect to interpretive conclusions. That is, we should allow, within limits, for individual differences in the interpretation of passages. In Methodical Bible Study, Dr. Traina wrote:

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statement has one meaning and one meaning only. In other words, all persons should arrive at exactly the same interpretation, thus leaving no room for the acknowledgment of legitimate individual differences in interpretation. This sentiment reflects the extreme objectification of interpretation in western exegesis prominent in the early 1950s, which gave scant attention to the role of the reading subject. In recent years we have come to see that such a statement is incorrect. Although we affirm the concern behind the statement, viz., that interpretive boundaries exist for every passage and no passage can mean just anything, we realize that the insistence on a “single meaning” is problematic, and that for two reasons.

For one thing, many biblical passages are multivalent, i.e., they allow for more than one specific interpretation. An example is John 11:35 (“Jesus wept.”) In my judgment, the context points equally to two quite different construals. On the one hand, the passage may indicate that Jesus is weeping for Lazarus. Although Jesus knew that he was about to resuscitate Lazarus he also knew that Lazarus would die again; and the sight of the mourners draws Jesus into the universal human experience of grieving. Such a reading provides a warrant for the proper role of grief and suggests that a place for genuine grief exists on the part even of those who affirm resurrection faith. On the other hand, the passage may indicate that Jesus is weeping for the mourners, profoundly saddened to see the pain experienced by those who fail fully to embrace the ultimate reality of the resurrection. This reading critiques a kind of grief that excludes or at least diminishes resurrection faith. These different interpretations are not mutually exclusive; but they are quite different. And both seem to be present.

But we encounter not only multivalence in the Bible, but (related to it) also some measure of indeterminacy (to borrow insights from Umberto Eco and Paul Ricoeur). All biblical passages stand somewhere on a continuum of determinacy and indeterminacy. Determinant passages are those whose range of plausible construals is quite narrow; whereas indeterminate passages have a much wider range of legitimate interpretations. It is important to note, though, that even passages on the indeterminate end of the spectrum have firm boundaries; the passage can mean only certain things and other construals are illegitimate. Conversely, passages on the determinate end of the continuum have some range of plausible construals. The range may be narrow; but some range exists nonetheless. In all cases, the interpretation that one draws within the range typically reflects that person’s experiences and/or ecclesial and cultural background. The ideal, of course, is to become aware of all legitimate interpretations within the sense boundaries of the passage so as to derive a full and dynamic understanding of the text. Such awareness comes through conversation with other interpreters, and especially those from other cultures and ecclesial traditions. And this consideration leads us
to speak of the communal aspect of interpretation.

If it is helpful to give space to individual encounter with the text, it is essential to give attention also to conversation with other readers, or conversation among readers. The Bible as canon belongs to the Church; and consequently the task of interpretation has been given not to isolated individuals but finally to the Church. Individual interpreters, then, participate in a vocation that has been given to the entire Church. Such a conversation with others in the Church can be direct or indirect. Direct conversation involves discussing biblical passages in groups or with other individuals. Indirect conversation pertains to becoming aware of the history of interpretation. We believe that this consultation with the history of interpretation is critically essential, and is part of the overall inductive process. It is essential because such consultation will prevent individual interpreters from idiosyncrasy as they test their own construals with insights from other interpreters. It is not that the interpretation of individual readers will necessarily be collapsed into what others have always said; but rather the history of interpretation will serve as a touchstone, with the result that individual interpretations will seek at least some connection with the judgment of other interpreters. Because of the importance to consult those who represent not simply one’s own culture and ecclesial tradition, one will be intentional in hearing voices from other cultures and theological traditions, including other periods of the church, e.g., the patristic, medieval, and Reformation periods.

The third conviction is that Bible study should include both intuition/imagination and linear logic. Dr. Traina used to say that inductive biblical study involved an “element of genius.” By this statement he did not mean that one either possessed this ability or one did not; but rather, he intended to suggest that the project includes an intuitive aspect. This statement agrees with the often-repeated dictum that interpretation is as much an art as it is a science. It belongs to the character of encounter with the biblical text that insights regarding passages (including theological significance and relation to other passages) flood upon us as we read the Scripture. Naturally, one’s background and experiences will play a key role here. But it is equally a part of biblical study to test these intuitions logically with firm evidence from the text and the history that bounds the text. In the parlance of inductive reasoning, this dual process involves putting forth hypotheses (imagination/intuition) and testing hypotheses (logic).

The fourth conviction is that Bible study should include both direct study of the text and indirect study of the text in the form of consultation of secondary sources. From the very beginning, inductive biblical study has privileged the direct study of the text, insisting that direct encounter should be given priority in terms of both emphasis and sequence. That is to say, as a general rule, students should give much greater attention to examining the
biblical text(s) itself than to examination of books/articles about the text; and, again as a general rule, students should begin with the rigorous scrutiny of the biblical text before moving into an investigation of scholarly treatments. Yet the communal character of biblical study requires that, as part of an overall inductive process, students acquaint themselves with insights from the scholarly community, from those, in other words, whom God has gifted to assist the Church in the right reading of the text. Some take “inductive Bible study” to refer to the direct study of the text, with the corollary that when one consults scholarly treatments, e.g., Bible dictionaries, histories, monographs, articles, or commentaries, one is no longer engaged in “inductive study,” but rather has moved to “deductive study.” Of course, this view pertains to the meaning of “inductive” and “deductive,” which I discussed earlier. Suffice it to say that our understanding of induction (and we think this is in line with the intention of most of those who have practiced inductive biblical study in academic settings) does not pertain to what is studied, but rather how one studies. Induction involves an open and tentative attitude towards all evidence, whether it is found in the biblical text or encountered in scholarly treatments about the text. It is for this reason that I typically require students who have completed their survey of a biblical book on the basis of direct encounter to immediately consult scholarly treatments of critical introduction. This process allows students, for example, to compare their understanding of the structure of a biblical book with scholarly presentations, including those that discuss ancient rhetoric and the ways in which insights from first-century Greco-Roman rhetoric might inform or clarify the structure of a NT book.

Related to this conviction that Bible study should include both direct study of the text and indirect study in the form of secondary sources is the fifth conviction, viz., that the study of the Bible should be text-centered but not text-exclusive. We do privilege the communicative sense of the text, attending especially to the form of the text (its literary structure and genres), because the Bible is essentially text, having communicative purpose. But inductive biblical study is not text-exclusive. After all, the Bible emerged from non-textual (or other-textual) historical realities (events, sources, etc.); and it reports or references historical realities; and it produces effects on readers (historical, theological, personal) that go beyond the text. We do justice to the full-orbed character of the Bible only if we attend to realities behind the text, surrounding the text and its production, and in front of the text in terms of its reception and implementation by readers. Thus, inductive study includes matters of historical background, critical introduction, and the history of effects, gathered from an examination of the ways in which the text has been used in liturgy, hymnody, literature, art, and theology (Wirkungsgeschichte, but all with a view towards illuminating the message of the text.
The sixth conviction is that inductive biblical study is a canonical approach that attends both to the unity and diversity of Scripture, and to the complex relationship between the message of the Bible and the faith of the Church.

I will discuss first the canon as pointing to the unity and diversity of Scripture. When one talks about the “Bible,” one is implying the canon of the Old and New Testaments. Thus it seems to us that “Bible study” takes seriously the fact that the canon is an assemblage of various originally separate books. The consideration that the canon contains various books reminds us that the basic literary unit in the Bible is the biblical book. This is a literary reality, in that writers produce books. Almost all biblical books bear the mark of careful planning and arrangement. That the basic unit of the Bible is the biblical book is also a canonical reality; for the canonical process in both Judaism and early Christianity involved making decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of books. Thus, the canon has a “book-ness” character. This means that the literary context for any biblical passage is the biblical book of which it is a part. When a writer produces a book he creates a “textual world,” and accordingly everything within a biblical book relates either directly or indirectly to everything else within that book. This insight reflects White’s specific compositional theory, which I described earlier.

This consideration that the canon contains various books alerts us also to the possibility of diversity within the Bible. In our judgment, an inductive examination of the whole of the Bible reveals that each book has its own perspective and emphases, with the consequence that it is problematic in an uncritical way to read the message of one book into another one, or to interpret passages in terms of the Bible as a whole without first attending seriously to their function and meaning within the biblical book in which they are found.

But it seems to us, too, that it is possible to overemphasize the diversity of the biblical canon at the expense of its underlying unity. The Bible evinces a profound unity, expressed both in the metanarrative (I prefer mega-narrative) that runs from beginning to end and in the recurrent themes which in most cases receive significantly consistent treatment (though with some variation). The existence of an underlying unity among the biblical books is suggested, among other things, by the consideration that the community of faith (both Jewish and Christian), after a prolonged process of use, reflection, and discussion, brought these specific books within the canonical assemblage, a testimony to the fact that the community recognized a profound coherence. One does not need to appeal to the role of the Holy Spirit in the process (although this is a supremely important consideration, and I personally affirm this reality); as a matter of purely historical probability, it is likely that these religious communities, engaged in such an extended and deliberate process of selection, recognized a theological coherence that is genuinely present.
Thus, the concept of canon, with its theological unity and interconnectedness, requires that we finally understand the message of individual passages and books in terms of their function within the canon as a whole.

I discuss now, and all too briefly, the significance of the canon for the relationship between the message of the Bible and the faith of the Church. The notion of canon suggests not only that it is an assemblage of books but also that it functions as the rule or norm for the community. This function of the biblical canon raises the question of the relationship between the Bible and the theological tradition of the Church, including the Church’s ecumenical creeds. This question involves a host of complex issues. Because of time constraints I will speak specifically of the relationship between canon and creed, making two critical observations.

First, in developing both the biblical canon and the great ecumenical creeds the Church averred that neither canon nor creed is sufficient in itself. The faithful life of the Church requires both. Second, we note that the canon is extensive and the creeds are skeletal. The creeds (and the various patristic expressions of the “rule of faith,” which are actually in a sense “proto-creeds”) provide a general theological framework, or a theological synthesis, of the biblical revelation, a synthesis to be sure that is itself historically conditioned, e.g., by the ecclesial controversies of the time and by the attempt to relate the truths of revelation to the thought categories of the late Graeco-Roman world. Thus, the canon gives specific and robust content to the affirmations of the creeds and develops aspects of the faith that are not addressable by the creeds, given their laconic form. On the other hand, the creeds provide assistance to our understanding of the broader contours of the biblical revelation; the creeds do not in themselves provide that understanding, but provide aid to our work in discerning the broad theological structure of biblical revelation. Because the Church made decisions establishing both canon and creed, we are justified in approaching the issue of their relationship with an expectation of correspondence, while at the same time, avoiding naked fideism; we are obliged respectfully (and for those in the community of faith, reverently) to test this correspondence. This seems to have been the position of W. W. White and The Biblical Seminary in New York, where the Seminary insisted that study there must be conducted in the context of evangelical commitment (which presumably includes at its center orthodox faith) and the Apostles’ Creed.

The seventh conviction is that the study of the Bible should be methodologically both broad and targeted. One of the effects of the attempt over the years to relate inductive biblical study to mainstream exegesis is the recognition that inductive Bible study is not actually one method alongside other methods, but is, or should be, a broad methodological approach that seeks to incorporate at the optimum point and in the optimum fashion
every legitimate exegetical task and every appropriate method (including critical methods).

Over the past thirty years a number of methods have burst upon the world of biblical studies, in addition to older ones, such as source, form and redaction criticism. We now have narrative criticism, social-scientific criticism, and various forms of socio-rhetorical criticism, to name but a few. And all too often the various exegetical tasks (e.g., word studies, research into historical background) as well as the several methods are understood in virtual isolation from one another. Books that present the various methods often suggest that readers have a smorgasbord from which they can choose the method they wish to employ, with the recognition that the method that is chosen will essentially determine interpretive results. For the most part, one looks in vain for a synthesis of the various methods and a discussion of the ways in which the individual exegetical tasks or the various methods relate to and impinge upon one another.

In our judgment, a major challenge facing biblical studies today is synthesis of these various exegetical processes and of these different methods into a holistic approach, which relates the various processes and methods to one another, and which adopts an eclectic orientation according to which the interpretive demands of individual passages determine which of these processes or methods will be most helpful. We have attempted just such a synthesis.

Yet the mention of synthesis implies a cohering center. Thus, inductive biblical study seeks to be not only broad, but also targeted. All that we do is directed toward the theological interpretation and appropriation of the final form of the text. Clearly, not all readers of the Bible accept this target as the primary goal of biblical study. But in our judgment this target reflects the essential character of the Bible. As to targeting theological interpretation and appropriation: Although the Bible contains history, science (broadly conceived), politics, and a host of other considerations, its essential Sache, content, is theological; it centers upon God, and God’s relationship to his creation, especially his human creation, including his people. As to targeting the final form of the text: The final form of the text is the only text we have. All scholarly reconstructions of earlier sources, or even the reconstruction of events, involve to a greater or lesser degree academic speculation. At any rate, the final form is essentially the canonical form. Insofar as we emphasize the Bible as canon we will focus on the final form.

The last conviction I will discuss is that an inductive approach involves a methodological process that is both specific and flexible. As I mentioned earlier, inductive biblical study pertains to both an attitude and a process that flows from it. Although sometimes inappropriately of method in the sense of concern for specific process, the study of biblical study necessarily involves specific tasks performed in a specific order; and that is method. In other
words, everyone has a method for the study of the Bible. It may or may not be a consistent method; it may or may not be helpful or effective; it may or may not be carefully considered. But even the most haphazard approach represents method. The question is not whether all persons employ method; they do. The question is whether the process adopted stems from proper considerations regarding the broad realities of the Bible, the reader(s) and the reading process, and the relationship between the Bible and the reader(s).

Inductive biblical study affirms that the matter of proper process must be characterized by flexibility. This conclusion stems from considerations regarding the nature of the reader(s), and attends to the fact that great differences exist among readers in terms of culture, background, mental processes, purpose, and time constraints. It is therefore both unrealistic and unreasonable to insist upon the adoption of one single proper procedure. In the end, the method that any reader adopts must be his or her own.

Yet many of us who have taught inductive biblical study have come to the conclusion that beginning students benefit from a structured approach that sets forth, as a working hypothesis and a place to start, a specific tentative model. It is of utmost importance that this model be presented as provisional and experimental. It is important, too, that as they progress students be not only encouraged but required to assess this procedure so as to decide what they should accept or reject, and to adapt what they do accept to their own mental processes, time constraints, needs, and purposes.

The provisional model that we adopt, and that is generally associated with the inductive approach, includes four broad phases: (1) Observe; (2) Interpret; (3) Appropriate/Apply; (4) Correlate. Observation includes the survey of the biblical book, survey of extended sections within the book, and detailed analysis (close reading) of individual paragraphs and sentences, all of which includes, but is by no means limited to, attention to the form of the text as expressed in literary structure and genre. From these observations students generate interpretive questions. Interpretation is the answering of questions raised in observation, by using relevant evidence, including literary context, word usage, historical background, history of the tradition, and interpretation of others, to mention but a few types of evidence. Appropriate/Apply includes evaluating the biblical passage/teaching as to its suitability for contemporary appropriation and assessing the contemporary situation to determine its relevance to the biblical passage/teaching and specifically and creatively bringing the biblical teaching to bear upon contemporary life. Correlate involves relating the teaching of individual passages and books to other portions of the Bible and dynamically synthesizing the teachings of individual passages and books within the whole of biblical revelation, towards developing a biblical theology.

Although these phases are presented in a specific order, beginning with observation, one should realize that it is not a simple linear process. These
phases tend to impinge upon each other; and, indeed, students necessarily move back and forth. Thus, e.g., students who are focusing upon interpretation will have occasion to make additional observations. Moreover, encountering the sense of a biblical passage in interpretation is, or should be, a formative experience, and thus may involve profound appropriation. These phases, then, are “targets,” or points of focus, assuring that the various essential aspects of biblical study are given sufficient attention. In addition, the specific four-phase procedure that I have just described pertains only to individual passages and books. Inductive biblical study attends not only to individual books and passages, but also to the broad presentation of themes or motifs throughout the biblical canon.

**Inductive Biblical Study and Postcolonial Interpretation**

As I mentioned earlier, inductive biblical study is methodologically tentative and constantly open to new insights. And from the very beginning, inductive biblical study has had a global concern, insistent that inductive study connects with persons coming from all of the world’s cultures. Both of these considerations prompt contemporary practitioners of inductive study to enter into conversation with major hermeneutical developments in the Majority World. One of the most prominent emerging hermeneutical movements in the Majority World today is postcolonial biblical interpretation.

Postcolonial interpretation is a burgeoning field of study; and the literature is increasing exponentially. For this reason, I will focus on just two representative treatments. I examine first the work of the Sri Lankan R. S. Sugirtharajah, and especially his book, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation.* Sugirtharajah explains that postcolonial criticism arose initially from Edward Said’s monumental book, *Orientalism*, in which Said described the western way of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” This awareness led to postcolonial studies, which “emerged as a way of engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of colonial presence.” Thus, according to Sugirtharajah, “postcolonial” signifies “a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from western slander and information of the colonial period, and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence.” It is thus “an instrument or method of analyzing situations where one social group dominated another.”

We should note that “postcolonial” does not necessarily imply that the period of colonialism is in the past. This postcolonial response of the colonized toward the colonizer may occur while experiencing colonial domination. Although Sugirtharajah and most other postcolonialists rely upon Marxism and Poststructuralism in response to the colonial programs
of European capitalistic countries, they acknowledge that postcolonialism may include response to colonizing, or domination, by powerful elites within the nation.

Accordingly, “the greatest single aim of postcolonial biblical criticism is to situate colonialism at the center of the Bible and biblical interpretation.” Thus, “what postcolonial biblical criticism does is to focus on the whole issue of expansion, domination, and imperialism as central forces in defining both the biblical narratives and biblical interpretations.”

Postcolonial biblical criticism gives primary place in the study of the Bible to the varied contextualized experiences of the colonized. It employs the idea or ideology of the experience of colonization as the criterion to assess both biblical interpretations and the biblical text itself. As Sugirtharajah puts it: “Postcolonial criticism is at its best when it seeks to critique not only the interpretation of texts but also the texts themselves. In this, postcolonial criticism is allied with most oppositional practices of our time, especially feminist.”

Therefore, on the one hand, postcolonial criticism examines how biblical interpreters engage their task in such a way as to ignore anti-colonial elements within the text or even to adopt interpretations that can be used imperialistically to dominate other groups (metacritical). On the other hand, postcolonial criticism approaches the biblical text with the suspicion that colonizing elements exist within the text itself. As Sugirtharajah says: “Anyone who engages with texts knows that they are not innocent and that they reflect the cultural, religious, political, or ideological interests and contexts out of which they emerge. What postcolonialism does is to highlight and scrutinize the ideologies texts embody and that are entrenched in them as they relate to the fact of colonialism.”

The result is that Sugirtharajah engages in a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the text, essentially adopting a canon outside the canon. The operative canon for Sugirtharajah is the situation or experience of the colonized. In cases where the biblical text aligns with that situation/experience the sense of the text is probed, employing the processes and methods that are used by exegetes generally, including practitioners of inductive biblical study. In these cases, Sugirtharajah rails against interpreters who misconstrue passages because of failure to take literary and historical context into account. This process of attending to the issues of domination and imperialism as they are embedded within the text often yields genuine new insight into the sense of the text. In other words, this process contributes to an inductive study of the text, revealing aspects of the text and the meanings of the text that we who belong to colonizing societies miss because of our social and cultural location. We greatly benefit, then, from hearing these other interpretive voices. And this consideration re-enforces the importance, in an inductive approach, of engaging
in conversation with other interpreters, especially those who are dispossessed and dominated.

But in cases where the biblical text does not align with the situation/experience of the colonized the biblical texts are themselves accorded the status of texts of terror that must either be resisted or appropriated contrary to their textual sense. Thus, Sugirtharajah attacks liberation theology for its “textism,” i.e., linking the meaning of the Bible to the sense of the text. According to Sugirtharajah, “Scriptures are not simply texts…but narratives and scenarios for episodes of life, and along with reading, these invite and call for a more varied expression of interpretive avenues—theatrical performance, iconography, visualization. What postcolonial biblical criticism tries to do is to liberate the field from one-sided literary emphasis and identify and encourage other forms of expressions.”

This language may sound evocative and creative, but it is actually an attempt to employ biblical passages in ways that contradict their textual meaning. Sugirtharajah insists: “For too long, the focus of biblical criticism has been on verbalization. It has been seen as a literary activity dealing exclusively with texts and words.” Sugirtharajah’s orientation here arises out of the conviction that the communicative sense of the biblical text often fails to address helpfully the situation of most contemporary persons, and especially the colonized: “Biblical studies is still seduced by the modernistic notion of using the rational as a key to open up texts and fails to accept intuition, sentiment, and emotion as a way into the text. By and large, the world of biblical interpretation is detached from the problems of the contemporary world and has become ineffectual because it has failed to challenge the status quo or work for any sort of social change.”

Thus, Sugirtharajah seeks to make the Bible relevant by pure contextualization, leading to the rejection of “textism” and for that matter, the role of ecclesial theological tradition as an interface partner with biblical studies; for the tradition of the Church is viewed as reactionary and serviceable to colonizing interests.

A number of issues arise here. Hermeneutically, this approach fails to embrace the reality that the Bible is fundamentally text. As I mentioned above in the discussion of transjective study, emotion, experience, and intuition play a critical role in biblical interpretation; but they provide critical resources for textual construal, and are not a substitute for the attempt to hear the message of the text. We are told, e.g., that in the study of the Book of Ruth we ought to focus upon and praise Orpah at the expense of Ruth: “While Ruth, the Moabite, is willing to assimilate with the dominant culture and espouse ethnic and cultural harmony, her sister-in-law, Orpah refuses to be part of the hegemonic agenda and turns back to her mother’s house, and thus to her own gods and goddesses and to her ancestors.” (And certain other postcolonialists, such as Laura Donaldson, tell us that we should read Joshua from the Canaanite perspective, since the Canaanites were victims of...
Israelite imperialism. These readings favor the point of view of postcolonialists over the point of view of the text in interpretation. And we are told regarding the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5: “Demonic possession was a type of social coping mechanism developed by the colonized to face the radical pressures imposed by colonialism.” Thus, the text’s emphasis upon transcendent cosmic powers, including God, is replaced by an exclusive imminentalism; for the transcendent emphasis in the biblical message is judged to be at best irrelevant to the practical needs of the suffering dominated and at worst itself imperialistic and thus a tool in the hands of colonizers. Even Jesus is critiqued as tacitly imperialistic and as insensitive to the subaltern in that he failed to call for “radical overhaul of the oppressive system.” The upshot is that many of the major perspectives of the biblical text—transcendence, eschatology, mission, faith, grace, the people of God—are either ignored or repudiated.

Yet these readings that are alien to the point of view of the text do have some value for us, in that they cause us to look at biblical passages in new and different ways that we would not have considered otherwise. And even if we cannot finally accept these interpretations they often yield indirectly a kind of interpretive clarity, perhaps a clarity that illumines the meaning of the text itself and is thus quite different from what the postcolonialists intend.

We are disappointed that in Sugirtharajah’s approach the Bible’s implicit canonical claims regarding unique revelation are not seriously considered: “Subjecting the Bible to postcolonial scrutiny does not reinforce its authority, but emphasizes its contradictory content. At a time when, outside of fundamentalist circles, Christian doctrines carry little weight and moral questions are less likely to be settled by biblical teachings, the Bible’s place has to be rethought…” For all of its critical scrutiny directed at the Bible, however, the postcolonialism of Sugirtharajah is notable for the lack of any self-criticism. We see not the slightest hint of any openness to the possibility that the message of the Bible might rightly challenge some of the perspectives embraced by postcolonialists. This absolutism is the hallmark of every ideological reading. The ideology is rendered unsusceptible to any critical assessment. In the end, this is the essence of a deductive approach.

While the postcolonialism of Sugirtharajah is primarily ideological, the version of postcolonialism represented by the Indian Simon Samuel in his book, And They Crucified Him: A Postcolonial Reading of the Story of Jesus, is primarily heuristic, i.e., it seeks to use postcolonial insights to arrive at an enhanced understanding of the message of the Bible. Samuel objects to Sugirtharajah’s almost exclusive employment of modern postcolonial experience under European capitalist domination as the framework for understanding the dynamics of hegemonic power. He wishes to broaden postcolonial criticism to include ancient experiences of both colonial and
nativistic (belonging to the same nation or ethnicity) discourses of power. Samuel also resists the reliance of Sugirtharajah and most other postcolonialists upon Marxist and Poststructuralist models, which tend to be binary, i.e., to think of postcolonial response as either anti- or pro-colonial. Samuel insists that the response of postcolonials is more complex, ranging from disruption (contradiction and antagonism toward colonizers) to mimicry (imitation of the rhetoric of colonial or nativistic powerful elites in order to subvert their power and epistemic constructions) to ambivalence and hybridity (symbiosis of acceptance and rejection of colonial or nativistic power discourse) to acceptance (submission to colonial or nativistic power).

Samuel employs the Gospel of Mark as a test case. His purpose is “to read the story of Jesus according to Mark as a postcolonial discourse of a minoritarian community under subjection and surveillance that tries to create a space in between the Roman colonial and relatively dominant native Jewish collaborative and nationalistic discourses of power. Its focus is to explore and find whether or not Mark is a resistant anti-colonial…discourse that mimics the imperium of Rome or a colonial/postcolonial discourse that accommodates and disrupts both the native elite Jewish and alien Roman discourses of power.” He concludes that “the portrait of Jesus in Mark can…be decoded as a colonial/postcolonial conundrum affiliative and disruptive to both the native and the colonial discourses of power.” We see, then, that Samuel’s method is more empirical (i.e., attentive to the range and complexity of responses actually found in the text) and thus more inductive than that of Sugirtharajah. Accordingly, Samuel acknowledges and embraces the role of the divine in Mark’s presentation of postcolonial responses, and refuses to reduce the hermeneutical project to human imminentalist considerations. He insists that “[in] practicing postcolonial studies in biblical studies it is important to treat the biblical discourses as imaginative, faith-centered, ficto-historical writings and popular postcolonial writings, which emanated from the colonial contexts of biblical antiquity….” Samuel thus insists that applying postcolonial analysis to the text can reveal significant aspects of meaning that otherwise remain hidden. Like Sugirtharajah, Samuel makes use of methodological practices that are employed also in our IBS process in order to identify and highlight postcolonial elements in the text. But he does so more consistently than Sugirtharajah, since Samuel is not bound to ideology in the same way or to the same extent.

Samuel also suggests that Afrasian Christians who have actually experienced postcolonialism and marginalization are more adept at postcolonial analysis than western readers who belong to colonizing cultures: “But unlike the west where Christianity grew under imperial and state patronage to become a colonial religion it remained a persecuted minority even after the two thousand years of its history not only in the place of its birth but also in many
neighboring Afrasian countries. The biblical discourse in most of these countries continues to remain a minoritarian discourse. Christians in the east, just as in the days of biblical antiquity, are still a ‘colonised’ minority in most Asian and African societies where they continue to experience ‘otherness’ in one way or another. The biblical discourses as far as they are concerned are anti- or postcolonial rather than colonist in nature.”

This statement reminds us that Christians in most of the Majority World are in many ways situationally closer to the biblical narratives and the original audience of the biblical writings than are we who are in the west, thereby suggesting the critical importance of hearing these voices as we seek to understand the biblical text in greater accuracy and depth.

Yet one wonders whether Samuel is warranted in insisting that the experience of the colonized or dominated is the key feature to interpretation of biblical passages in general. I suspect that Samuel’s choice of the Gospel of Mark as a test case is not accidental. For many years scholars have recognized that of all the Gospels Mark is arguably the most resistant to the Roman imperium. Nevertheless, even in Mark Rome does not receive a great deal of explicit attention. Samuel himself acknowledges, “It may be rather puzzling that in the early part of Mark’s story we neither read of any direct reference to the Roman colonial presence nor get an impression that the story has anything explicit to say about this political phenomenon. However, this need not necessarily surprise us because avoidance of a direct reference to colonialism can be a strategy in any anti or postcolonial writings, which originate in colonial contexts.”

Apparently if colonialism is mentioned it suggests postcolonial interest; and if it is not mentioned that likewise suggests postcolonial interest.

Moreover, Samuel largely neglects those passages in the Gospels where Sugirtharajah and other postcolonialists, with some justification, see imperialistic aspects in Jesus’ teaching, e.g., the coercive and punitive power of Christ at the coming of the Kingdom of God in consummation. One value of Sugirtharajah’s study is the acknowledgment that the Bible does not universally adopt a subversive stance in relation to imperial power, but sometimes seems to embrace it, as in the wars of extermination in the Book of Joshua, for example. It may be that an inductive examination of the entire canon reveals that the Bible is not unequivocally postcolonial, that its attitude towards colonialism or imperialism is complex, and that the Bible resists attempts to read every passage according to a postcolonial response to dominant power.

Nevertheless, postcolonial criticism can inform inductive Bible study insofar as postcolonialism is incorporated into a broad program that inductively assesses the issues of individual passages and, in an eclectic fashion, utilizes those specific exegetical procedures and critical methods that are required by
the interpretive demands of the particular passage. But in addition, an awareness of issues of power and domination suggested by postcolonial criticism can make those of us in the western interpretive tradition more sensitive to these elements within the text, and can help us to see the implicit pro-colonial bias in our interpretations.

Conclusion

We have seen that inductive biblical study has both a history and a future. The history provides the basic orientation and the essential contours. The character of inductive biblical study, informed by its history, is that although it is not methodologically fluid yet it is methodologically open. Inductive biblical study maintains an inductive stance not only towards the text but also towards its own methodological process. It engages with all methods and hermeneutical approaches practiced around the world and seeks, on the basis of honest assessment, to adopt and incorporate what is deemed legitimate and useful, as well as responsibly and frankly to offer critique, even as it seeks to receive critique. And in this day of global awareness, inductive biblical study will be especially attentive to insights from the Majority World in order both to enhance the study of the Bible for those in the western world and to make inductive biblical study all the more relevant and compelling for those in the Majority World.

Endnotes


3 Eberhardt, 145-159.

4 Ibid., 145.

6 Eberhardt, 31.

7 Eberhardt, 52.

8 Bauer and Traina, 281-87.

9 Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer: Thoughts on our Training for the Ministry of Intercession* (Chicago: Revell, 1885).


11 Eberhardt, p. 76.


13 For significant literary, audio, and visual resources on the history and character of inductive biblical study, see the website www.inductivebiblicalstudy.com.

14 Bauer and Traina, 363-69.

15 Bauer and Traina, 28-37.


17 Traina, “Inductive Bible Study Reexamined in Light of Contemporary Hermeneutics I,” 54-62.


20 Traina, *Methodical Bible Study*, 182.


23 Bauer and Traina, 50-52.


25 This term is notoriously difficult to translate. It is usually rendered “history of effects” or “history of response.” It pertains to the practice of examining the various ways in which passages have been employed in a variety of venues, e.g., literature and art, in order that these insights might be used as a heuristic (discovery) device to illuminate aspects of the meaning of the text that we otherwise might miss. Several recent commentaries employ this method, especially the German commentary series Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament. For examples in English see the articles by Rudolf Schnackenburg and Ulrich Luz in David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell, eds., *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 251-310.
Note here the extensive work done on this issue by Francis Watson, *Text, Church, and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

Eberhardt, 211-16.

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