

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A FRIENDLY CRITIQUE OF RICHARD HAYS' HERMENEUTIC STEP,
ESPECIALLY CHAPTER 13 AND THE NEW TESTAMENT'S USE OF THE OLD

A PRESENTATION SUBMITTED TO DR. REGGIE KIDD AND DR. SCOTT SWAIN

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- I. Overview of Hays goal in ch. 13: Hays is building a case for proper ethical hermeneutics.
 - A. Steps 1 and 2 (descriptive & synthetic) sought to answer *What* does the New Testament say about ethics *then*? Now in step 3 (hermeneutic) he asks, *How* ought we to use the New Testament *today*?
 - i. In other words, in chapter 13 we are seeking to comprehend how to properly *use* the NT in applying ethical norms today, assuming we already know *what* a text (or group of texts) mean in their original context.
 - ii. Hays is attempting to bridge the gap between the “world” of the text and our present “world.”
 - B. Step 3 (ch. 13) shifts the focus away from the general (historical theology) to the specific (pragmatic theology).
 - i. Ch. 11 sets up the diagnostic questions about how ethicists *in general* use the NT ethically. This task yields a diagnostic checklist on pp. 212-13.
 - ii. Ch. 12 surveyed some prominent NT ethicists according to Hays’ diagnostic checklist.
 - iii. And now in Ch. 13 Hays moves from ethicists in general *to us in particular*, asking how *we* should use the NT texts.
 - C. Looking at the big picture of Hays’ methodology adumbrates critical observations, which will be unpacked further below.
 - i. Hays’ hermeneutic methodology contrasts *in part* with a Reformed approach in terms of **methodological starting points**.
 - ii. By starting with an historical-theological approach (i.e. “How Do *Ethicists* Use Scripture?”) Hays’ hermeneutic methodology risks a naturalistic fallacy critique: One cannot prove an ethical “ought” (i.e. Hays pragmatic argument in ch. 13) from an historical “is” (i.e. Hays historical surveys in chs. 11 & 12). (See the opening paragraph of ch. 13, p. 291. Also, throughout ch. 13 Hays bases his ethical proposals upon historical surveys.)
 - iii. Rather than *first* looking to ethicists, Reformed theology grounds hermeneutic methodology in theology proper (doctrine of God) (WCF I.4), asking first of all, *What is Scripture?* and *How does God use Scripture?* (WCF I.1). Historical theology serves a secondary/derivative/servant methodological role in Reformed methodology, a role that remains in full dependence upon Holy Spirit (theology proper) at every point (WCF I.5).
 - a) Notice the foundation of the ethical “ought” in WCF I.4,

**for which Scripture “ought to be believed, and obeyed”:
the ethical ought is grounded “wholly upon God.”**

- b) Reformed theology does not deride historical theology (WCF I.5a); rather, the *methodological dependence* of Reformed theology’s Creator-creature distinction (WCF I.5b; c.f. the repetition of “authority” throughout WCF I) is the only path to true, fully-robust *creaturely independence* by which man can enjoy full use of historical theology’s manifold delights.
 - Anything less than full creaturely dependence upon God as a matter of first principle would make man’s use of historical theology idolatry.

II. Specific Scope of ch. 13: Hays argues his view of how the OT relates to the NT.

A. Apologetic: Hays believes in *sola Scriptura* (necessity) and *tota Scriptura* (sufficiency).

- i. I am not a Marcionite (p. 306)! Compare Hays’ prior disabuse of any Marcionite impulse on p. 9.
- ii. Furthermore, Hays has written a whole book on Paul’s use of OT: *Conversion of the Imagination*.
 - a) In the last essay in *Conversion*, Hays puts himself within the (broadly) Reformed tradition on the necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*): “The Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century proclaimed that God’s word in Scripture must serve as the final judge of all human tradition and experience. Left to our own devices, we are capable of infinite self-deception, confusion, and evil. We therefore must turn to Scripture and submit ourselves to it, the Reformers insisted, to find our disorders rightly diagnosed and healed.”
 - b) And further, Hays states in this same essay that we have no hope of salvation without the Scriptures. With an eye to our chapter, notice Hays’ explicit Christ-centered, canonical hermeneutic: “... Only through the biblical writers’ testimony do we encounter the message of God’s grace; only the revelation of Jesus Christ, disclosed uniquely and irreplaceably through the testimony of the evangelists and apostles, tells us the truth about the merciful God and our relationship to that God. Without

this word which comes to us from outside ourselves, we are lost.”

- iii. Can we then give brother Hays a *tota Scriptura* high five in addition to the *sola Scriptura* high five? With a brotherly judgment of charity, yes; however, in light of Scripture's presentation of a robust doctrine of God and this doctrine's implications for hermeneutics we cannot ignore significant inconsistencies in both Hays' theory and praxis of his hermeneutical metaethic (which will be critiqued below).
- B. Evaluation of Hays' position on OT-NT unity.
- i. Overview: Hays argues that NT texts only make sense in light of OT subtexts; for, the NT is the culmination and continuation of the story begun in the OT.
 - ii. Hays' three general responses for explaining the relation of OT to NT include:
 - a) The nature of the case is that one cannot read the NT without hearing the voice of the OT.
 - b) Hays' three synthetic images depend upon the OT:
 - Community: NT church is continuation of OT Israel.
 - Creation: Creation and re-creation themes in NT arise out of Genesis and prophets like Isaiah.
 - Cross: While not found explicitly in the OT, the cross is implicitly foreshadowed/prefigured throughout the OT via metaphors, such as the day of Atonement, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, etc. The cross, then, must be seen as a distinctive contribution of the NT.
 - c) The Cross (death and resurrection of Jesus) becomes the central hermeneutical lens through which to view the entire canon. Thus, we must make appropriate hermeneutical adjustments in light of the cross.
 - iii. Critique: A comparison and contrast with Reformed hermeneutical metaethics.
 - a) Comparison: Hays has *much* to be commended.
 - Hays appears to be in the same hermeneutical ballpark as Reformed views of "Christ-centered" or "Christotelic" hermeneutics, especially as the OT relates to the NT.

- Compare Ed Clowney's *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*.
 - Compare Graeme Goldsworthy's chapter 7, "We begin and end with Christ," in *According to Plan: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. (I think Goldsworthy coined the phrase, "Reading the Bible backwards" [i.e. starting with Christ].)
 - Compare Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*.
- Many similarities exist between aspects of Hays' and Frame's methodologies, for example:
 - Compare Hays' notion of hermeneutics as performance and embodiment (304-6) with Frame's view of *obedience* as a necessary perspective on knowledge of God.
 - Hays' explanation of how metaphor works in the hermeneutical spiral (298-304) brings to mind Frame's argument for the existential perspective being a necessary hermeneutical factor. (Compare further Richard Pratt's deference construct, an expansion of Frame's ideas, with Hays' explanation of metaphor's role in hermeneutics.)
- b) Contrast: In Reformed theology the unity of Scripture is not a purely hermeneutic matter, but is also a covenantal issue (i.e. unity of the covenant of grace). And insofar as the unity of the covenant of grace relates to the doctrine of God (i.e. *pactum salutis*), hermeneutic and covenantal issues must be related to theology proper in order to attain full methodological consistency. Therefore, a significant contrast between Hays' method and Reformed hermeneutic methodology is that the latter seeks at every point to subsume its methodology underneath its doctrine of God; whereas, the former is prone to outbreaks of human autonomy through failing to consistently relate methodology to theology proper.
- For example, though Hays admits Scripture to be *extra nos* (p. 8) and Christianity's *norma normans* (p. 10), some of Hays' actions (i.e. severely limiting the Pauline corpus based on text-critical

argumentation) evidence methodological ambivalence inconsistent with such principles:

- Does Scripture's *norma normans* authority apply only to the Christian community or to all people? Hays limits his argument to the former, seeking merely to show "how Scripture might form and inform moral judgment within the church" (p. 296). Such an admission is a serious limitation and is **inconsistent** with the very idea of a *norma normans*! For example, what about the cosmic scope of God's revelation—does God rule the entire cosmos by His word (i.e. Heb. 1:3)? Did God create all things by His Word (Gen. 1:1; John 1; etc.)?
- If Scripture is *extra nos*, what role does human reason play in the science of text criticism? Who is the ultimate judge of canonicity? What role does God's providence play within the science of textual criticism? Is God *extra nos* too? If so, what role does God play in hermeneutics?
- Specifically related to chapter 13, my critique offers one fundamental question toward Hays' ten proposed guidelines for NT ethics (pp. 309-10): **Whence comes the authority for the ethical "oughts," "musts," and "shoulds" in each of the ten proposals?**
 - Each of Hays' ten proposals only make sense in the context of the doctrine of God, a context which Hays fails to account for consistently. In a word, ethics presupposes God; Hays does not account fully for his presupposition.
- I'll try to unpack my critique a bit more with the following humble questions:

III. Humble Questions: A critique of inconsistencies in Hay's hermeneutic methodology.

A. Does the Reformed view of a fundamental unity between OT and NT

being rooted in the Covenant of Grace display a different starting point (i.e. starting with a Vantillian two-circles metaphysic, which roots the unity first in God Himself, God's special *and general* revelation, God's providence, God's enlightening, etc.) from Hays' approach (which situates the unity in the historically-conditioned text and community without mentioning, at least significantly, the implications of divine origin and preservation of Scripture, especially the role of God's providence)? Yes, as hinted at above.

- B. Are Reformed theologians justified in claiming a fundamental unity between OT and NT under the term Covenant of Grace? Meredith Kline (*Kingdom Prologue*, p. 6) argues yes, biblical warrant exists, at least "in principle," for us to claim an overarching covenantal unity throughout the whole canon:
- i. "Once we are satisfied that we have arrived at a proper concept of covenant and have in mind employing the succession of divine covenants as a general scheme for a biblical theology, the question arises whether we should classify as covenants various arrangements that are not specifically labelled *berith* or *diatheke* in the Bible. This problem takes a couple of different forms. One involves the traditional procedure of covenant theology whereby the individual *berith-diatheke* transactions of redemptive history are combined into ever more comprehensive "covenant" entities, culminating in what is usually called the Covenant of Grace, which encompasses all the redemptive administrations from the Fall to the Consummation. If it is recognized that there is a fundamental unity among all the individual covenants brought under the overarching Covenant of Grace, the process of identifying higher levels of covenantal unity is surely proper, for the biblical authors themselves already did that kind of systematizing of the covenants. For example, in Psalm 105:9,10 (cf. 2 Kgs 13:23; 1 Chr 16:16,17) there is a virtual identifying of God's separate covenantal transactions with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And the separate covenants enacted by Moses at Sinai and in Moab and the later renewals of this arrangement in Joshua 24 and elsewhere in the Old Testament are repeatedly spoken of by later Old Testament authors and by New Testament authors as one covenant of the Lord with Israel, which the Book of Hebrews refers to as the "first" over against the "new" or "second" covenant (Heb 8:6-8). In principle then there is biblical precedent for the systematic organizer of the covenants to identify the over-all unity of the redemptive covenants by some such term as the Covenant

of Grace.”

- C. Second, if yes to B, then because of the *divine origin* of the Covenant of Grace, aren't we then forced to reflect upon the relation between the *pactum salutis* and the Covenant of grace when seeking to reflect upon the historically conditioned nature of Scripture? (What I have in mind here is Hays discussion “timeless truth” and “culturally conditioned elements” in pp. 298-304.) In other words, if the unity of Scripture is rooted in the Covenant of Grace, then shouldn't the divine origin (including the divine revelation and divine enlightenment) come into the foreground at every point and set a proper humility upon our hearts at all times when discussing the nature of Scripture's unity and its historical conditioning?
- i. I see an analogy here between my attempted critique of Hays' method and that of Richard Pratt's critique of Pete Enns' *Inspiration and Incarnation* (see http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/Pratt.Westminster.Today.2006.html). The basic gist of Pratt's critique is to say that our basic attitude toward Scripture's authority ought to be derivative of our doctrine of God (i.e. the Creator-creature distinction). Enns' book evidences what is in vogue in current biblical studies scholarship: start from below rather than from above; Pratt thinks the theological implications of this unbalanced view are unwise. (Though Enns disagrees about his level of unbalance. See his response: <http://peterennsonline.com/ii/a-conversation-with-richard-pratts-westminster-and-contemporary-reformed-hermeneutics/> .)
 - ii. Following the trajectory of Pratt's attempted corrective in bringing the doctrine of God to the foreground does not mean we ignore the historical nature of Scripture at all. Rather, paradoxically, re-affirming the biblical metaphysic *frees us* from the unbearable burdens of human autonomy in our pursuit of the historical questions and problems related to human knowledge of divine revelation. In a word, admitting our creaturely dependence allows us to pursue God in the most free way possible: as dependent creature-servants.
- D. A related question gets to **the heart of my critique of Hays** from another angle: Why does it appear that Reformed theologians are not as troubled by the “diversity” of Scripture as is Hays (i.e. proposal 3 on p. 310)? It seems that theologians who root the unity of Scripture in God Himself are more quick to see the diversity as a benefit revealing God's glory, not a problem to be solved. For example, Geerhardus Vos sees such diversity as

a wonderful tribute to God's multifaceted glory, not a threat to Scripture's authority or infallibility:

- i. "It is urged that the discovery of so considerable an amount of variableness and differentiation in the Bible must be fatal to the belief in its absoluteness and infallibility. If Paul has one point of view and Peter another, then each can be at best only approximately correct. This would actually follow, if the truth did not carry in itself a multiformity of aspects. But infallibility is not inseparable from dull uniformity. **The truth is inherently rich and complex, because God is so Himself.** The whole contention ultimately rests on a wrong view of God's nature and His relation to the world, a view at bottom Deistical. It conceives of God as standing outside of His own creation and therefor having to put up for the instrumentation of His revealing speech with such imperfect forms and organs as it offers Him. The didactic, dialectic mentality of Paul would thus become a hindrance for the idea communication of the message, no less than the simple, practical, untutored mind of Peter. From the standpoint of Theism the matter shapes itself quite differently. **The truth having inherently many sides, and God having access to and control of all intended organs of revelation, shaped each one of these for the precise purpose to be served.** The Gospel having a precise, doctrinal structure, the doctrinally-gifted Paul was the fit organ for expressing this, because his gifts had been conferred and cultivated in advance with a view to it (*Vos' Biblical Theology*, p. 8; emphasis mine).
- ii. From Vos' perspective, Hays' inconsistencies arise out of a deistic tendency—in other words, an insufficiently robust doctrine of God with all that such a robust view entails (i.e. omnipotence, providence, enlightenment, etc.).