

BIBLICAL MEGATRENDS: TOWARDS A PARADIGM
FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE
IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to offer some observations about megatrends in Biblical interpretations and, in particular, the interpretation of the Bible in the electronics media culture of the late 20th century. The generative question can be put in several ways: what is the shape of the paradigm of the electronic Bible, of the traditions of Israel's religion on the holy TV and the holy computer as well as in a holy book? What does an electronic hermeneutic look like or sound like? Would you know one if you met one in a vision or walking beside you on the street? And if you met one should you run away, kill it or take it to your heart? We are not at a stage in which a fully documented theory can be formulated. The absence of footnotes is an indication of the seriousness of my intent only to suggest rather than to prove. The value of this type of essay may be in drawing some tentative observations together and submitting them for reaction and further discussion. This is a think piece.

Thomas Kuhn's description of paradigm shifts in the history of science identifies some of the processes involved in paradigm shifts that is appropriate here. Paradigm shifts occur when there is a failure in normal problem solving, when the results yielded by the old methods no longer work. This leads to thought experiments and to a proliferation of various articulations and willingness to try new approaches. Out of this comes a new gestalt, a primary shift in the way in which the material is perceived. Two things happen: 1) the achievements based on a new theory and type of research attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity; 2) the theory is sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for future practitioners to resolve.

I hear the symptoms of a crisis of paradigmatic proportions in current Biblical research. The primary reason is that the paradigm no longer achieves its purpose. The promise of the historical critical paradigm was that it would render the past alive and would result in illumination and vitality for the religious community. The religious communities that have accepted historical criticism since the 19th century are in decline and the educational enterprise of critical study of the Bible has been massively reduced in theological curriculums since the 1930's because it did not produce spiritual vitality and life. The symptoms of the problem are also reflected in the Society.

The basic paradigm of historical criticism that was generally accepted even fifteen years ago has been fractured. The multiplication of methodologies and research paradigms at an SBL meeting is incredible in comparison to meetings as recent as 1970. But, in spite of all our labor, the impact of historical critical study of the Scriptures on religious communities and the culture in general is minimal in comparison to the beginning of this century. But normal science goes on as if the same formulas and patterns of research will have the same effect. We continue to undertake research projects and to publish books. But increasingly we only write for each other and the results of our research are ignored even by the religious

community. We write more and more with less and less effect. To put it simply, the existing paradigm is not producing the results it promised.

Theories have two primary functions: they make it possible to account for the data that can be presently observed and they make possible predictions that can be tested by normal scientific research. I want to suggest a theory that explains why this is happening and generates a radically different paradigm for future research. Arthur Schlesinger made a clear statement of the primary principle of this theory on a recent PBS program on Marshall McLuhan. He said, "Marx argued that the major movements in history are caused by changes in the modes of production and exchange. McLuhan said that the major movements in history are caused by changes in the modes of communication." Stated in relation to the interpretation of the Bible, the thesis would be that the major movements or paradigm shifts in the history of Biblical interpretation are related to changes in the dominant medium of communication.

The task of Biblical interpretation is- to render the primary traditions of the Bible meaningful and alive for persons and communities in later, radically different, cultural and historical contexts. The primary communications system of the community provides the contexts within which Biblical interpretation happens. It determines the values, attitudes, and overall hermeneutical options for the interpretation of the Biblical tradition in that cultural context.

II. *The Paradigms of Biblical Interpretation*

If the theory is accurate, the expectation would be that the major changes in communications systems are followed by paradigm of in Biblical interpretation. The theory appears to work and a discernible paradigm of Biblical interpretation can be identified in each media age.

A. *The Bible in Oral Culture*

In the oral age, the medium was exclusively sound and the sounds were transmitted by memory. The sounds were generally a kind of chant at least for the narrative, prophetic, and psalm traditions. In the narrative material this chant was improvised on known formulas as in oral poetry now. The way of connecting the present experience of the audience with the holy event of the past was by retelling or representing the material in light of later experience. Thus, the editors of the Pentateuch and the authors of the Gospels all used a common hermeneutical system. Interpreters of this oral tradition were accredited by 'oral authority generally granted by a master of the tradition. Storytellers and prophet preachers constituted the primary system of distribution.

B. *The Bible in Manuscript Culture*

The historical analysis of the appropriation of writing is more complex. But to make the complex simple, I would propose that writing was appropriated as a servant of oral hermeneutics until the late first century. At that time, a decision had to be made within Israel because of a combination of social, political, and cultural factors of which the prevalence of writing as the dominant communications system in the Hellenistic world was the most important sign of the growing dominance of Hellenistic culture. The new paradigm was based on the distribution of the primary traditions of Israel in writing. Symptoms of this paradigm

were: the collection and organization of oral traditions in manuscripts, the production of multiple Biblical manuscripts, the formation of a canon, the cantillation of manuscripts in public worship, the formation of the synagogue/congregation as a place for public readings, and the development of oral forms of commentary on the written manuscripts. Both Pharisaic and Christian Judaism adopted the reading aloud of manuscripts as a primary form for the experience of the written tradition. The words were recited exactly as written and even the chants began to be regulated. This regulation developed until it was written down and fixed by the development of accent systems – in Hebrew the trope marks, and in Greek the accents. The accreditation of an interpreter of the tradition was accomplished by oral disputation. All of these characteristics the movements shared in common.

But Christian Judaism developed a new hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation growing out of this communications system. The primary characteristic of this new hermeneutic was interpretation by ideas. It was essentially an appropriation of the philosophical methods of the Greeks for which Eric Havelock's description of the earlier transition in Athenian culture is instructive. In order to render the Scriptures meaningful in relation to this Neo-Platonic system, allegorical interpretation was developed and became the normative form of Biblical interpretation in Christianity. Theology, the identification and development of doctrine, and the formation of a communications system based on writing in a catholic church-these are symptoms of this paradigm shift.

Pharisaic Judaism also adopted writing as an integral part of Biblical interpretation. But in that new paradigm the oral law remained primary. The oral tradition which produced the Mishnah and the Talmud was organized around memorization of oral law, the interpretation of the written law in relation to the living of individual and communal life, and the maintenance of face to face community. Rabbinic Judaism never developed a full-orbed theological tradition and it appropriated writing in strict subordination to orality. Thus, the paradigm shift associated with writing is evident in the divergent hermeneutics of Christianity and Judaism as each community sought to respond to Hellenistic culture in which writing was the most powerful medium of communication.

C. The Bible in Print Culture

The paradigm shift in Biblical interpretation associated with printing is relatively easy to identify. The replacement of the highly allegorical hermeneutics of medieval exegesis by the combination of literal and figural hermeneutics in the Reformation was part of a new paradigm of Biblical interpretation. Vernacular translations, the printing and distribution of the Bible, historical studies of Greek and Hebrew documents in relation to their original meaning, the priority of the sermon, the development of Lutheran hymns and Calvinist psalmody – these were all parts of the new paradigm of biblical interpretation that emerged in the aftermath of the printing press. The sounds of the Scriptures continued to be read aloud but increasingly in a normal voice without intonation. The availability of texts made it possible for private reading of the texts to be a normal context for study and interpretation. The accreditation of interpreters shifted from an oral disputation to the oral defense of a written thesis. A new distribution system emerged as printed texts of the Scriptures and interpretations of the Bible in printed books and tracts became highly marketable.

D. The Bible in the Culture of Silent Print/Documents

Historical criticism developed in the context of the age of silent reading. In the late 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and in the 19th and 20th centuries in America, silent reading became the normal mode for perception of written texts. This is evident in the shift of audience address from "Listen, lordings" in the poems of the 16th century to "Dear reader" in the novels of Henry Fielding and Jane Austen. In this period, for the first time, the Biblical documents were normally studied in silence and the text became increasingly disassociated from sound. Sometimes the sounds continued to be imagined by the readers. But my perception is that this has declined in recent generations as speed reading has become more widely adopted by graduate students as a necessity for survival as secondary literature has multiplied.

Hans Frei's work, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, is an accurate description of the paradigm of Biblical interpretation in the age of the Enlightenment. As Frei shows, both the radical historical critics and the supernaturalists new common presupposition which he calls "meaning as reference." The meaning of the texts was defined by their value as documentary sources for the establishment of either historical facticity – what Frei calls "ostensive reference" – or theological truths or ideas – what Frei calls "ideal reference." The system of distribution of both Biblical texts and interpretations was and is a massive multiplication of books-thousands and thousands of books-reference sources, the Biblical texts themselves in various arrangements and translations, and books about the Bible in ever increasing numbers up to the present avalanche.

Thus, there appears to be a demonstrable correlation between media change and the emergence of paradigm shifts in the history of Biblical interpretation. And certain characteristics can be identified when one examines each of these paradigms as a separate system. When seen as a whole history, sound, chant, and memorization decline and largely disappear in the dominant paradigm. But the old paradigms do not disappear totally. Instead, the old paradigms are reappropriated and used in new ways within the context of the new paradigm. Thus, the chanting of the original oral medium persisted ill the manuscript paradigm and the allegorical hermeneutic of the manuscript paradigm has been continued in new forms in each of the subsequent paradigms.

Furthermore, in each age, other paradigms including virtually all of the paradigms of previous ages have persisted in groups that have resisted earlier paradigm shifts. As a result, paradigm shifts happen at very different stages in the development of different religious and cultural groups. Thus, Raymond Brown in Roman Catholicism and Jacob Neusner in Judaism have been leaders in the quite recent appropriation of the paradigm of historical criticism for the interpretation of the Scriptures in the Catholic tradition, and of the Mishnah and the Talmud in the Jewish tradition. Perhaps not coincidentally, these scholars have generated a prodigious output of books not unlike the output of earlier generations of German Protestant scholars.

III. *A Pattern of Response to Biblical Paradigm Shifts*

There also appears to be a discernible correlation between the major schisms in the communities of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the development of new paradigms of Biblical interpretation. In each period of adjustment to the culture generated by a new communications medium and a new paradigm of Biblical interpretation there is a patter of response that can be characterized as resistance, appropriation, and capitulation.

The conservative response in each age is to resist the new culture generated by the new medium but to incorporate the medium into the old culture and its hermeneutics. Thus, in the period of the adaptation of the tradition of Israel to the manuscript paradigm, Pharisaic Judaism resisted the Hellenistic culture associated with writing. It incorporated writing and the written law into Jewish culture and even formed a canon of the written law. But the written law was studied and appropriated in the context of orality and the characteristic cultural patterns of the oral age. The ongoing formation of the oral law in first the Mishnah and then the Talmud continued the primary oral hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation. Interpreters of the tradition continued to be authorized by the oral processes of rabbinic education rather than in any sense by publication of written works.

Christian Judaism appropriated the new medium and its culture and formed a new synthesis which integrated the old medium and its culture into a new hermeneutical paradigm. The struggle between the Antiochene and Alexandrian schools of literal and allegorical interpretation were the primary sign of the tensions in this new paradigm. The Antiochene wing maintained close relationships with Rabbinic Judaism while the world of Hellenistic philosophy formed the primary cultural matrix of the Alexandrians. In the end, the new synthesis formed by Christianity adopted the allegorical methods of Hellenistic culture while maintaining essential continuity with the more literal methods of interpretation generated by the oral culture which gave birth to the Scriptures. The tension between Origen and Jerome resulted in a new hermeneutical synthesis.

Gnosticism in both its Jewish and Christian forms can be seen as a capitulation response in which the new medium and its culture became so dominant that the old medium and its culture were rejected. The highly individualistic culture of the world of writing with its consuming interest in speculative and creative ideas became the norm of Biblical interpretation. The new culture and its values generated a hermeneutical system and institutions that actively sought to disassociate the sophisticated present from the primitive past.

In the period of adjustment to the paradigm of print and the culture with which it was associated, the Roman Catholic response was to resist the new culture of which the printing, distribution, and historical interpretation of the Scriptures was a part. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent, Catholics appropriated the essential patterns of the culture associated with printing. But in relation to Biblical interpretation, this adaptation maintained strict subordination to the cultural patterns and "fourfold" hermeneutical paradigms of the manuscript period. In no way was independent interpretation of the Scriptures allowed to compromise the tradition.

Protestantism adopted the new medium and its culture and developed a new synthesis that maintained essential continuity with the tradition. Luther and Calvin were Biblical scholars who generated a massive series of printed texts including vernacular translations, commentaries on the original Greek and Hebrew texts, and doctrinal systems that used the texts as the primary source. The hermeneutical system was primarily theological but made a doctrine based on a literal interpretation of the Biblical texts. This new hermeneutic made possible the widespread distribution of the texts and the formation of communities of independent Biblical interpreters that were held together by a common hermeneutical framework.

Protestant scholasticism capitulated to the culture of the university and rejected both the old culture and the old medium. The university rather than the church became the primary institutional matrix for this form of culture Christianity.

Finally, in the age of silent print, in various stages in Europe and America, the historical critical study of the Bible as a document to be read in silence was resisted by Catholics, Protestant supernaturalists and fundamentalists, and orthodox Jews. In each instance, the new medium and the study of the Bible as a historical document has gradually been incorporated into the old culture. But the synthesis of a scientific interpretation of the Bible and the culture of the Enlightenment took place first within the mainstream of the Protestant churches. The Protestant churches adopted the new medium and its culture and created a new hermeneutical paradigm while maintaining continuity with the tradition. The formation of scientific societies for the study of the Bible, the SBL, SNTS, and CBA are the institutional offspring of this paradigm shift. Kummel's history of interpretation, *The New Testament*, is a chronicle of this paradigm and its development. The critics of the radical liberal tradition capitulated to the culture of the university and eliminated the basic characteristics of the old medium such as, for example, the memorization and recital of the Scripture.

Thus, the theory that changes in the dominant communications medium of the culture are closely correlated with the megatrends of Biblical interpretation also may shed light on the sources of reformation and schism in the history of religious communities. There is a close correlation between the ecclesiastical divisions in the history of Christianity, paradigm shifts in Biblical interpretation, and changes in the systems of communication.

IV. Biblical Scholarship Today in Light of Media Megatrends

The implications of this theory for the present context of Biblical interpretation are interesting. In relation to communications technology, the 20th century has witnessed the most extensive changes in the means of communication since the development of writing. The printing press was only a more efficient and uniform way of producing written materials and silent reading was a change in the way in which writing was normally perceived. But the elements of continuity with the written manuscript were primary: marks on paper, bound together in books, read with the eyes, distributed by being moved from place to place, and requiring extensive training in order to be perceived. Electronic communications is a radically different means of communication: no needed paper, widely varied distribution systems, both audio and visual data, instant availability, and no required education to be perceived. The only media change that compares in magnitude with the shift from literacy to electronics is the shift from orality to literacy. In light of the changes in Biblical interpretation that took place in response to earlier media shifts, we live at a critical juncture in the history of Biblical interpretation.

The most powerful interpreters of the Bible in electronic media are conservative evangelicals and pentecostals, most of whom have little or no scholarly training. The Bible is talked about constantly but is rarely presented in electronic media. The Living Bible has been by far the most successful and widely used new version of the Bible. And the religious communities in which this type of interpretation is done are growing at a rapid rate. In my judgment, the interpretation of the Bible in the present world of electronic media is a capitulation to American media culture and is profoundly flawed in ways that do not maintain essential continuity with the tradition. The new culture that has developed with electronic

media has become the norm for Biblical interpretation. What will sell on American TV has become the primary norm of exegetical validity. However, while this is in my opinion an accurate generalization, it needs to be tested by more detailed evaluation of the range of Biblical interpretation that is being produced in records, TV, and film.

The community of Biblical scholarship and the churches which it serves have almost exclusively resisted electronic media and its culture. The guild has refused to enter into the interpretation of the Bible in the electronic world. Biblical scholarship has integrated elements of audio-visuals such as slides and some films into its paradigm to a minimal degree. Computers, which make possible the electronic processing of texts, have been enthusiastically integrated into the paradigm of historical critical scholarship. But the world of audio tapes and records, TV, and films has been an alien culture for orthodox Biblical interpretation. At this point in history, the best Biblical interpreters of our culture have abandoned the defense and commendation of responsible interpretation of the Biblical tradition in the most powerful communications medium of our age. That task has been given over to self-appointed religious entrepreneurs.

A projection on the basis of the mega trends of the past would suggest that this response will become increasingly retrogressive and will result in a withdrawal of the scholarly community from the dominant culture into a defensive posture. This response is not necessarily cataclysmic. Those parts of the tradition that have resisted earlier media changes – Rabbinic Judaism, Roman Catholicism, conservative/fundamentalist Protestantism – have made important contributions to the interpretation of the Bible. But the culture that is being formed by electronic media will thereby be ignored. And the consequences of allowing this travesty of authentic Biblical interpretation to go unchallenged in the present religious and political context will be great.

However, while Biblical scholarship has not consciously addressed the issue of media change, the theory does explain the fracturing of the historical critical consensus that has taken place in the last two decades. The collapse of Biblical theology as a strong and viable hermeneutic, the emergence of narrative theology and literary critical methods of exegesis, the impact of semiotics and deconstruction, the development of social science methods of analysis—all are connected by a common epistemological thread which moves away from the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal to the phenomena of sense experience itself. In electronic media and its cultures, what is known is what is seen and heard. That is, the theory would suggest that the declining impact of historical critical scholarship is a symptom of a change in the culture. These developments in Biblical scholarship are responses to that new culture and its ways of knowing. This effort is more likely to succeed, however, if the need for a new paradigm of Biblical interpretation is addressed directly.

V. A Paradigm for Biblical/ Interpretation in Electronic Media

The transmission and interpretation of the Bible is a process of communication. The meaning of communication acts is directly influenced by the means or media of communication in any particular cultural setting. This fact is particularly evident when new communications technologies emerge and gradually establish a new communications system. The meaning of the old system of interpretation changes and becomes associated with the past rather than the present. The old system can only be maintained by cutting the connection to the emerging new culture, generally by attacking the new medium and the culture with

which it is associated. Inevitably, however, even the maintenance of the old system requires adjustments to the new communications situation and the old hermeneutic is modified.

The transmission and interpretation of the Bible in a new communications system and its various cultural matrices require the development of a new paradigm. Some of the major elements in the paradigms of Biblical interpretation are: the reformation of the Biblical traditions themselves for transmission in the new medium, the development of systems of production and distribution, and the formation of a hermeneutic that will make possible meaningful connections between the traditions in the new medium and the original tradition

A. The Bible in Electronic Media

The first step is to put the Biblical tradition into the new medium, what might be called the transmediation of the tradition. In each new media age this is the first task: e.g., the writing of the original manuscripts of the oral tradition, the translations into the Vulgate and German, Codex Vaticanus and the Gutenberg Bible, Westcott and Hort and the spate of recent translations for silent reading. In each case, the Bible was put into the new medium of the age in a loving and responsible manner that preserved continuity with the traditions of the past. What is needed, therefore, is an electronic Bible that accomplishes the same purpose for this new media age.

The computer is making this possible in electronic text with relative ease and with much greater breadth than has ever before been possible: e.g., Ibycus and the TLG CD-ROM system. But in the audio and video media the task remains to be done in ways that integrate the previous paradigms into the new paradigm. Audio tapes of the King James Version have been made by Elizabethan actors and videos of dramatized versions of central Biblical narratives are being made in the New Media Bible. But they are anachronistic and poorly conceived. To dramatize Biblical narratives is to change their form from narrative to drama, from a single speaker to a series of actors. However, this is only one of a whole series of problems that need to be solved. Audio is easier than video in which the problem of images must be resolved. But, regardless of the problems, the task is clear. The Biblical tradition itself needs to be made available in the medium of the age, electronic media.

A foundational step will be to reconceive the Bible as sounds rather than as documents. This in turn raises a new set of questions for historical research: how did the Bible sound in its original form? While it may be impossible for us to know precisely how Greek and Hebrew were pronounced in the ancient world and the exact melodies that were used for a particular text, historical research is eminently possible that will at least get us in the ballpark. The basic methodology for this study is to compare the extant traditions of Hebrew and Greek cantillation and to reconstruct by comparison the sounds of the original sources from which these extant traditions developed. The scholarship in this area has reached a high degree of agreement that cantillation has been an integral part of Christian and Jewish worship and education throughout the East and until as late as the medieval period in the West. That is, we know that the Scriptures were originally chanted in services of both synagogue and Church. In view of recent research on oral poetry and narrative such as the studies of Lord and Parry, the probability is also high that this practice in the recital of the manuscripts continued and formalized a more spontaneous process of chanting that was characteristic of oral tradition. Thus, we will need to know more about the sounds of the Biblical tradition in order to accomplish an informed translation of the Bible into the sounds of our age.

Thus, a major element in the paradigm shift is the recognition that the Bible is sounds that were recorded in manuscripts so that they could again be resounded rather than texts to be studied in silence. We also need to know the basic units of sound in the history of the tradition. Rather than the units of the documentary tradition as an editing of words or ideas as we have tended to think, the tradition history of the Bible was a recomposition of sounds not unlike the transposition of and development of American hymn tunes in the music of Ives or Copland. The entire paradigm on which the study of the Pentateuch and the Synoptic problem has been based is fundamentally flawed because of an anachronistic reading back of our media world of silent documents into the ancient world. We need, therefore, to reexamine the entire tradition history of the Scriptures historically as a tradition of sound.

Once this is known to a greater degree it will be possible to develop interpretations of the tradition using the melodies and harmonies that are more characteristic of modern civilization in electronic media. Thus, the need to develop a whole new translation of the Bible for recital rather than for study. New ways of printing the texts will indicate the units of sound in the tradition. Various types of recital of the tradition in experimental modes will make the Scriptures directly available in electronic media. Thus, just as a primary task of scholarship has been to produce the best documentary form of the tradition, a new task is to produce the best electronic form of the tradition, the electronic version of Codex Vaticanus, the Masoretic text, the King James Bible, and whatever modern translation you think is best. But a foundational element of that Bible will be the music and melody of the sounds of the tradition.

In relation to video, the question is: what are the appropriate visual components of Biblical texts? Symbols, art (both icons and paintings), photographs and video montage, the sights of liturgy and worship, the faces of living persons, historical documentary footage, and dramatizations – all are possible visual elements of Biblical texts. Answering this question will involve research into the history and theology of images and experimentation with a range of options.

B. The Production and Distribution of the Electronic Bible

As is evident from the book display at SBL, the community of Biblical interpreters is presently organized to produce and distribute interpretations of the Bible in the medium of print, primarily print intended to be read in silence. The task before us is the development of systems of production and distribution for the Bible in electronic media. The religious communities will probably be the primary source for these systems but Biblical scholars may need to take their own initiatives. To my knowledge, there are no existing production houses or distribution agencies that have been persuaded of this need. The past sales record of the Bible itself and related materials may eventually provide the commercial motivation once viable projects are generated. But this is unlikely in the early stages. Biblical interpreters will have to fight to maintain integrity because of the complexity and cost of the electronic production and distribution systems needed to accomplish the task.

C. The Medium of Interpretation of the Electronic Bible

In the previous paradigms of Biblical interpretation, the earlier media of interpretation were continued and reformed in relation to the new paradigm. The original oral medium of the storytellers, prophets, and psalmists was reformed in the paradigms of writing into oral

interpretation of the written texts in preaching and teaching. In an electronic paradigm, oral and written interpretation will be continued and reformed. New forms may emerge. For example, storytelling has experienced a renaissance in the culture and in Biblical interpretation in the last ten years. The development of narrative preaching and Biblical storytelling is a post-literate orality that could only have happened in the context of the culture of the 'electronic age. The character of books is also changing: e.g., fewer tomes, more short books, multiplication of specialized publications and journals. The medium of interpretation of the electronic Bible will be a media-mix of oral, written, and electronic elements.

D. *The Hermeneutics of the Electronic Bible*

The most complex issue is the way in which meaningful connections will be made between the contemporary world and the world of the Bible in an electronic paradigm of Biblical interpretation. Media change is a major factor that has generally been unrecognized in the hermeneutical literature including that of the "new" hermeneutic. What will be the hermeneutics of the electronic age?

The medium of communication establishes certain constraints that operate in the formation of meaning in that medium. In Preface to Plato, Eric Havelock has shown the way in which the transition from orality to literacy necessitated an epistemological revolution of separating the knower from what is known through reflecting on the ideas reflected in sense experience. This primary revolution of the perception of sense experience as pointing beyond itself to transcendent ideas is an essential component of the world of literacy. I would suggest that, in the tradition of Biblical interpretation, this epistemological revolution associated with literacy took place in the development of theology as the primary hermeneutical system for Biblical interpretation within Christianity. In its various forms, theology has been the way in the Christian tradition that connections have been made between the contemporary world and the world of the Bible. Theology as a hermeneutic has been based on the distinction between the phenomena of the Bible itself and the theological truths or noumena to which the Bible points.

The problem of Biblical interpretation in an electronic paradigm that theological modes of interpretation do not work in this medium of what Ong calls secondary orality. One sign of the problem can be observed when one contemplates the transmediation of theological works. Imagine the grandeur of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* or Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on TV or audio tape; or the fascination of theologians and Biblical scholars on TV having a theological or exegetical debate. This is death with no resurrection. Electronic media reinforce a thoroughly empirical epistemology. Sense experience is reality, not simply a shadow on a wall. Theology is based on the distinction between sense experience and reality; it relies on abstractions and argumentation. In audio and video, midrash, well done, is far more interesting than theology. The need then is for a non-theological hermeneutic for the interpretation of the Bible in an electronic paradigm.

Narrative hermeneutics, semiotics, phenomenology, and process hermeneutics may all be candidates for this primary role in the transposition of the Bible into this new context. But my inclination is to let the hermeneutic develop from the Bible itself. This has been the mainstream of the Biblical interpretive tradition in which the hermeneutics have never been philosophically pure but have combined elements in unique ways that are finally generated by the Biblical tradition itself. This does not mean that we can go back to proof-texting,

peshers, or to simple repetition of the traditions themselves. But it does mean that various interpretive methods will need to be used over a period of time and evaluated in relation to their appropriateness and faithfulness to the spirit that formed the Bible. It is the doing of this evaluative task for which theology will be of indispensable assistance in the future.

The argument can be stated in a less abstract manner. When we have put the authoritative interpreters of the orthodox tradition, namely, scholars who have spent their lives writing books, on TV, they are a disaster. They come off as boring, above it all, irrelevant, wordy, and generally a drag. And because they know that, most of them have never even dreamed of trying. On the other hand, fundamentalist evangelists who have never been to seminary, who practice an utterly irresponsible form of Biblical interpretation and who couldn't write their way out of a paper bag get on the boob tube and they are terrific. They are engaging, sharp, and accessible. Their exegesis sheds light on the Biblical text and helps people connect with it. As interpreters of the tradition, they are far more effective in the medium than scholars.

What are we to conclude? Their content is horrible but it works in the medium; the content of the orthodox is true but it does not work in the medium. Most scholars have concluded that the problem is the medium, that electronic media are demonic and that we should fight it by writing more and more books. This strategy is increasingly becoming like that of the Polish army who sent division after division of cavalry against Hitler's tanks.

But another analysis is possible. The tradition of the scholarly community has been definitively shaped by the mastery of writing. We all got our degrees by proving our competence in the medium of silent print. Our tradition has been determined by the hermeneutics of the world of writing. That hermeneutical system and its styles of communication do not work well in electronic media. The tradition of the evangelicals on TV, and radio has been definitively shaped by resistance to historical criticism. Most of the people on TV either never went to seminary and, if they did, learned as little as possible about historical criticism. Most of them cut their eye teeth on the sawdust trail and are masters of oral communication. The oral hermeneutics of the revival and of peshers interpretation work well in electronic media.

We have concluded as scholars that our message is incompatible with electronic media. And theological discourse and scholarly analysis in its traditional forms appears to be. But must we equate our tradition with the Bible itself?

In the paradigm of the world of writing, the Bible has been defined as a set of reference sources for the historical events and theological ideas of the Biblical period. To be faithful has meant, therefore, that one must be faithful to those traditions. In Christianity, authenticity has been defined by theological orthodoxy, by the recognizable presence of certain ideas and styles. But theology is not the Bible nor is it the primary language of the Biblical tradition. It is a hermeneutical language, a secondary, reflective language. If we use the language and literature of theology as our norm for what is authentically Biblical, our approach to electronic media will be as if we would put literary, music, and film critics on TV and never have storytellers, musicians, or athletes. Imagine TV as a series of critical discussions about stories, music, and sports.

I would propose, therefore, that the problem of the Bible in 'electronic media is a new form of the old problem of the authority of the tradition and the Scriptures. If the tradition of

the interpretive paradigm of silent print is the authority of the Bible in electronic media, it is impossible. But if the Scriptures themselves are taken as the authority and the model, the world of electronic media is open to a new world of interpretive possibilities.

We have become radically confused about the character of the Bible. In the traditions of Israel of which the early Christian sect was an integral part, over half of both the Hebrew and Christian canon were stories. The traditions of prophecy and psalm were poetry. The wisdom tradition was proverbs not unlike contemporary advertising. Parables, proverbs, poetry, apocalyptic – those were the primary languages of the Biblical tradition and they will work well in electronic media.

We have equated the Bible and its faithful interpretation with theology. Our entire paradigm is designed to yield information about the ideas of the tradition rather than the experiences. The shape of a new hermeneutic is the shape of experience, of the direct rendering of the revelation of God in story, song, proverb, and vision.

Just as the Church faced a new situation in the second and third century in which the leaders and thinkers of the Church finally had no choice but to develop allegorical and theological methods in order to interpret the traditions of Israel and the early Church in the Hellenistic world, so now we may have no choice but to develop new methods in order to interpret those same traditions in this new cultural context. Thus, we might begin to produce the Bible as a series of audio and video tapes in which connections to the contemporary culture are explored in parabolic, symbolic, and storytelling styles. But the question is: how can we accurately communicate the meaning of the Biblical tradition in its original historical context in the world of electronic media and its various cultures?

VI. *A Personal Paradigm Shift*

I had a paradigm shift once and, while I am not a great scientist who has had a major impact on the field, it might be helpful in clarifying the character of the electronic paradigm. When I was doing research for my dissertation on Mark's passion narrative, I wanted to know what his story meant as a story. So I read all the commentaries and was trying to identify the units of Mark's narrative. And all I could see were the seams between Mark's redaction and the pre-Markan tradition and the implications of those additions for Mark's theology. But I literally could not see anything about the story as a story. And the harder I looked, the more frustrated I became. After weeks of frustration getting nowhere I decided to start over. The conclusion of most scholars was that Mark's passion narrative had probably been passed on by memory for some years before it was written down. And I knew that narratives in the ancient world were generally chanted, often with a lyre.

I put all my books away, got my guitar, and sat down at my desk and began to memorize Mark's narrative in Greek and to chant it. At first I thought I was crazy, and then later, when I sang it for my friends and my advisor, I knew I was crazy. But I worked on it until I could do the whole thing. In the process, I went through a paradigm shift. I have never been able to experience the documents in the same way since that time. For me, the Bible is no longer a document to be studied in silence. It is sounds that were intended to be heard again.

VII. *Concluding Suggestions*

Changes in the dominant medium of communication create radically new situations for the transmission and interpretation of the Bible. There is a direct correlation between the development of writing, printing, and silent reading and the major revolutions in Biblical interpretation, namely, allegorical interpretation, literal/figural interpretation, and historical critical interpretation. The development of electronic communications in the 20th century is the most radical change in the primary means of communication since at least the printing press and probably since the development of writing.

This communications revolution has had a major effect on Biblical criticism and has been a primary source of the fracturing of the historical critical paradigm in the last 25 years. But the formative cause of this change has largely been unrecognized. Biblical scholarship has continued to operate within the communications world of silent print as if electronic communications has not happened. It may be time now to recognize that the transmission and interpretation of the Bible in the world of electronic communications is the most important shaping influence and constructive challenge for the future of Biblical scholarship. The reason for the declining impact of historical critical work may be that we are not interpreting the Bible in electronic media, specifically radio, audio, and TV. But in order to do that, we will have to change our ways of perceiving and interpreting the tradition. If this theory is accurate, Biblical scholarship is in the early stages of a paradigm shift of major proportions. And if previous media changes are at all indicative of the future, religious communities will experience some significant conflicts over the issues that will be generated by this tradition.