

CHANGING CHANNELS

**The Church and
the Television Revolution**

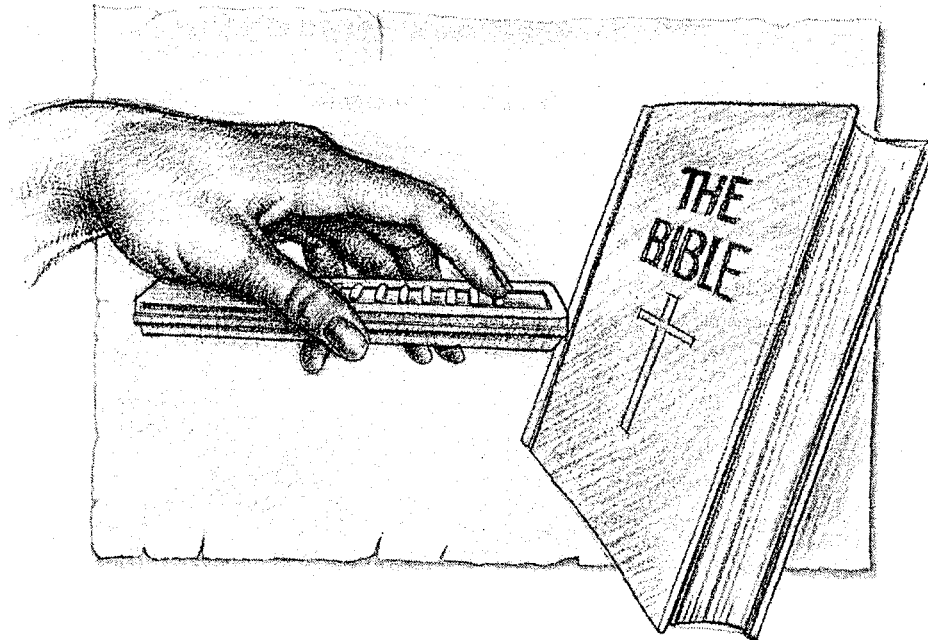
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"I almost never use my trained critical faculties, as you call them, when I watch television. I am a sucker for involvement. I am almost instantly sucked in, and I suspend virtually all critical faculties until later. The whole notion of Television Awareness Training has always struck me as absurd. I can do it, but television has a degree of power to involve me that is awesome. I have to be careful, because I can be really taken in."



"If I had all the money in the world and could produce any program I wanted, it would be an audiovisual translation of the Bible. It would be, for our time, another Latin Vulgate or Luther's German translation. "

"I watch a lot of television. It depends on how much I watch whether I feel guilty. I generally watch sporting events. I graze mercilessly. That is what I do when I really want to escape."

"In terms of television and my work as a biblical scholar, I am increasingly aware that I look for, especially late at night, someone to pray with, someone to think about God with. I look but I don't find. I know I am not the only one who is searching for some late-night electronic way to be related to God. I suspect there are lots and lots of people like me, using television at all hours of the day and night to try to cope with their lives, looking for God."

"My picture of television is as an electronic camera. It is the reason why story is the most natural form for television. That is why I am optimistic about television. Story is the most natural form for the children of Israel throughout the ages. One of the ironies about the present for me is that this is not being experienced or even recognized. I feel as if I am a person before my time."

"My work on storytelling, and on the degree to which even when it was written down it was experienced as oral, has convinced me in my deepest mind and soul that television is not a threat. Indeed, the whole Christian community was formed in relation to a medium and a culture other than that of writing. I am not afraid of the electronic media in a way that I think

most people are. They seem to be, at some foundational level, so spooked that they have to attack the electronic media in order to defend their tradition."

"God has given us electronic communications and the possibility of forming a worldwide communications community in order to save us from ourselves. The church has a primary mission as a part of the plan of God to be an agent for the salvation of the world at the time when we have the technology to destroy it. I do not see any religion that has the same power for peace and reconciliation as is present in the gospel of Jesus Christ."

(CHAPTER THREE)

A NEW PARADIGM FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE ON TELEVISION

Thomas E. Boomershine

In the history of Western Christianity there is a discernible correlation between major changes in communications technology, schisms in the communities of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the development of new paradigms of biblical interpretation.¹ In each period of adjustment to the culture generated by a new dominant communications medium and a new paradigm of biblical interpretation, there is a pattern of response that can be characterized as resistance, appropriation and capitulation.

MODES OF INTERPRETATION AND COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

The conservative response in each age is to resist the new culture generated by the new medium while incorporating the medium into the old culture and its hermeneutics, or its methods of interpretation. 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 the oral law and the characteristic cultural patterns of the oral age. The ongoing formation of the oral law first in 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. To state this thesis/ antithesis/synthesis in terms of persons, the tension between Origen and Jerome resulted in Augustine's 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 dissociate the sophisticated literary philosophical present from the primitive oral narrative 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 were 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 original texts as the primary source. The hermeneutical system was the development of theological 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.²

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 throughout 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, as well as orthodox Jews.³ In each instance the new medium and the study of the Bible as an 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 first took place within the mainstream of the Protestant churches. The Protestant churches appropriated the new medium and its culture and created a new hermeneutical paradigm while maintaining continuity with the tradition. The scientific societies for the study of the Bible, such as the Society of Biblical Literature and the Society for New Testament Studies, are the institutional offspring of this paradigm shift. The radical liberal tradition capitulated to the culture of the university and eliminated the basic characteristics of the old medium, for example, the memorization and recital of the scripture.

Thus, the major changes in the dominant communications medium of Western culture are closely correlated with the mega trends of biblical interpretation. This in turn sheds light on the sources of reformation and schism in the history of Western Christian communities. There is a close correlation between the ecclesiastical divisions in the history of Western

Christianity, paradigm shifts in biblical interpretation, and changes in the systems of communication.

CURRENT BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF MEDIA HISTORY

The implications of this theory for the present context of biblical interpretation are arresting. In relation to communications technology the twentieth century has witnessed the most extensive changes in the media of communication since the development of writing. The printing press was only a more efficient and uniform way of producing written materials while silent reading was a change in the way in which writing was normally perceived. But the elements of continuity between the printed book and the written manuscript were extensive. Books like manuscripts were ink marks on paper pages that were bound together in books and read with the eyes. Both were distributed by being moved from place to place and required extensive training in order to be perceived.

Electronic communications technology is a radically different medium of communication. Television, for example, employs no paper, has widely varied distribution systems, and is perceived by both eyes and ears. It is instantly available and requires no special education in order to be perceived. The only medium change that compares in magnitude with the shift from written to electronic communications 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 church's response to this new medium and its culture has not generated a new paradigm for the transmission and interpretation of the Bible. The most powerful interpreters of the Bible on television are conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals, most of whom have little or no scholarly training. The Bible is talked about constantly but is rarely presented for its own sake. 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 along with television has become the norm for biblical interpretation. What will sell on American television has become the primary norm of exegetical validity.

To the minimal degree that the Bible itself is presented, the paradigm of biblical interpretation is the conservative wing of biblical interpretation that was developed as a part of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment periods. The Bible is literally waved in front of the eyes as a reference source to support a wide range of theological, historical and political positions. But any notion of either encouraging independent study of the Bible or of the ambiguity of its witness is foreign to this use of the Bible as the support for American conservative culture.

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 culture of electronic media. Apart from a few isolated and poorly funded videos, there are virtually no television programs on the Bible produced by the major Protestant and Catholic churches and their scholarly leaders. 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, television 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. In the age of the greatest media change since the development of writing, biblical scholarship continues to live and work in the medium world of silent print as if nothing has changed since the late nineteenth century.

A projection on the basis of the trends of the past would suggest that this response will become increasingly retrogressive and will result in a withdrawal of the interpretive 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, such as Rabbinic Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and conservative/fundamentalist Protestantism, maintained their communities by making relatively minor adjustments in the previous systems of biblical interpretation. But the culture that is being formed by electronic media and the people who are a part of that culture will thereby be ignored. 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. Rather than being the progressive vanguard of the future, historical criticism is increasingly in a position of defending and preserving an earlier culture that is threatened by present developments. 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. The theory would suggest that the declining impact of historical critical scholarship and the collapse of its scientific framework 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.

A PARADIGM FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The theory stated as simply as possible is as follows. The transmission and interpretation of the Bible is a process of communication. The meaning of communication events 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.⁴

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 elements in the paradigms of biblical interpretation are: the formation of the biblical traditions themselves for transmission in the new medium, the development of systems of production

and distribution, the formation of a hermeneutic that will make possible meaningful connections between the traditions in the new medium and the original tradition, and a process for the training and accreditation of interpreters.

Furthermore, with the addition of each new paradigm of biblical interpretation for a new medium and its culture, the previous paradigms are not discarded but are integrated into the new paradigm. Thus, a new paradigm is defined by: 1) the medium in which the Bible itself is transmitted and experienced, 2) the media mix in which the Bible is interpreted, 3) the system of production and distribution by which both the Bible and its interpretation is made available, and 4) the hermeneutic or interpretive framework by means of which the biblical traditions are connected with the present.

TRANSMEDIAZATION: THE BIBLE IN ELECIRONIC MEDIA

The first step is to put the biblical tradition into the new medium, a "transmediazation of the texts." In each new media age this is the first task. Thus, the transition to manuscript technology required that the oral traditions be edited so that they could be written down in manuscripts. In the era of print new critical texts and vernacular translations were developed for the production of printed Bibles. And the silent print era has been associated with the multiplication of a wide range of study Bibles that are designed to be used in silent study.

In each case the central traditions about God were put into the new medium of the age in a loving and responsible manner that preserved continuity with the traditions of the past. Through this process the Bible has been made available to the new culture that was formed in association with each new communications technology. Furthermore, these new texts and translations have been resisted by those who were opposed to any form of cultural accommodation. What is needed, therefore, is an electronic Bible that accomplishes the same purpose for the culture of the electronic age.

The transmediazation of the Bible into television will require that the biblical tradition be presented as sounds and images on a screen rather than as printed marks on a page. The production of a Bible that is composed of sounds and images rather than written texts, however, requires a different process, both in the study of the original manuscripts and in the production of an audio-video translation. A whole new set of factors influence the meaning of the text when it is presented in sounds and images. Rhythm, intonation, attitude, volume, repetition of sounds and emotion are major factors in oral recitation in ways that are largely irrelevant for a written translation. And the images of the text have not really been considered at all as a part of biblical translation. Thus, our present methods for the study of the texts of the Bible do not produce information about the sounds and images of the text.

The first step in the development of a Bible for television will be to gain an understanding of the sounds and images of the biblical texts in their original languages and cultural contexts. How did the Bible originally sound? What were the images that were called forth by the texts? The exegesis of the texts as sound and image will require two interactive stages of investigation. The aural and visual signs of the texts will need to be understood against the background of the sounds and images of the cultures of the ancient world.

The sociology and psychology of oral cultures and of the recitation of sacred scripture within those cultures is the place to begin this study. Recent studies of oral and literate cultures and of oral and written scripture provide a sound foundation for this work.⁵ The areas that will

need to be understood range from the styles and functions of oral recitation, the role of images in oral performance of sacred traditions, the relationship of written texts to the recital of the tradition, and the role of music in the sounds of the sacred traditions. That is, the texts will need to be exegeted against the background of their original context in terms of communications media and culture.

The foundation of the television Bible will be to understand the sounds and images of the texts themselves. This process will require new methods of exegetical study that will focus, first of all, on identifying the oral characteristics of the text in its original context. The units of speech will need to be identified. Where do the minor and major pauses occur? This is related to the concerns of rhetorical criticism but focuses on the sounds of the ancient texts. It will also be important to identify the mnemonic structures of the text.

Since one of the goals of the translation will be to make it as easy to remember as possible, the patterns of organization in the oral text that were intended to facilitate memory will need to be known. In order to even perceive these structures, it may be necessary to memorize the texts in their original languages. Furthermore, the text's rhythm, melody, volume and tempo will need to be identified as well as the elements of alliteration and assonance, parallelism, repetition, chiasm and the rhetorical appeals to the ancient audience. Only this redefined understanding of exegesis will provide an adequate foundation for an audio-video translation of the Bible. Until we know as much as possible about the sounds of the texts in their original context, we cannot translate them into the words and styles of contemporary languages and television styles.

This raises the question about how much we can actually know about the sounds of the ancient texts. We know relatively little, for example, about the precise pronunciation of ancient languages and the melodies for the cantillation of ancient sacred texts. 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 possible that will enable us to gain a more accurate understanding of the sounds of the ancient texts than we have at present. In relation to the melodies of ancient recital, a basic methodology for this study will be to compare the extant traditions of Hebrew and Greek cantillation and to reconstruct the sounds of the original sources from which these extant traditions developed.

The scholarship in this area has reached a significant degree of agreement that cantillation was an integral part of Christian and Jewish worship and education throughout the period of antiquity.⁶ 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 Perry, the probability is also high that this practice in the recital of the manuscripts continued in a formalized manner the spontaneous process of chanting that was characteristic of oral tradition.⁷ 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.

Once this is known to a greater degree it will be possible to develop translations of the Bible using the melodies and harmonies that are more characteristic of modern civilization in electronic media. Thus, we need to develop a whole new series of translations of the Bible for recital rather than for study. Once this is accomplished we will also need to develop new ways of printing the texts that will indicate the units of sound in the translation. 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. It will be the correlate for an electronic age of Codex Vaticanus, the Masoretic text, the King James Bible, and whatever modern translation one thinks is best.

The investigation of the images of the texts is even more difficult. What are the appropriate visual components of biblical texts? At the first level this will involve the estimation of the visual components implicit in the experience of the original texts. One way of pursuing the question is to ask what the original audience actually saw. The images in the synagogues or catacombs as well as the faces of the reciter and the other listeners are possible visual elements. This might lead to dramatized recitals of the biblical texts in an ancient setting.

Another focus is to identify, the images the text invites the audience to see in their imaginations. The representation of those images might be highly symbolic and fluid. Symbols, religious art in the tradition of two dimensional icons and three dimensional paintings, photographs and video montage, the sights of liturgy and worship, the faces of living persons, historical documentary footage: 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.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ELECTRONIC BIBLE

In every earlier media age after the original oral period, the production and distribution of the Bible has been done in a combination of ways. The most important form of distribution has been the oral recitation of the texts in public worship. But the production and distribution of biblical texts has steadily grown. As is evident from the book display at any meeting of biblical scholars, clergy or church conference, the community of biblical interpreters is presently organized to produce and distribute the Bible in the medium of print, primarily print intended to be read in silence. But when you consider all the materials about the Bible presently produced for use in the life of the churches, it comprises an immensely complex mix.

The task before us is to develop systems of production and distribution of the Bible in electronic media. The religious communities will be the primary source for these systems, but biblical scholars may need to take their own initiatives. To our knowledge there are no existing production houses or distribution agencies that have been persuaded of the need for an audio-video translation based on careful scholarship. Two major biblical video projects have been produced: the New Media Bible and the Hanna-Barbera series for children. Both have been commercial ventures with virtually no foundation in biblical scholarship or historical study.

For different reasons our evaluation of these projects is not positive. Both are flawed by basic decisions about format and by a lack of understanding or appreciation of the character of the Bible. The New Media Bible transforms biblical narratives into a series of dramas. The Hanna-Barbera series is symbolized by its twentieth century children who enter the biblical situations via a time warp. The series is frequently highly anachronistic and steadily reads contemporary issues back into the texts in inappropriate ways. Only when the format of the project itself grows out of an understanding of the Bible in its original media context will there be the hope of an authentic translation. Only a production house and distribution system

developed and owned by the church will have even the possibility of sufficient reverence for the Bible and its critical role in the church's mission to invest in such a new translation.

The conclusion is, therefore, that the production and distribution of the electronic Bible will need to be generated and controlled by the church. Only when the translation is conceived as an integral part of the church's thought and a translation will it be produced in a manner worthy of the Bible itself. The primary motivation for this project is to make the biblical tradition available to the television culture. However, the past sales record of both the Bible and related interpretive materials may help to support the vision, once viable projects are generated. In all probability, audio, video and computer Bibles will best be distributed with accompanying interpretive books. But biblical interpreters will have to fight to maintain integrity because of the complexity of the production and distribution systems needed to accomplish the task.

In the previous periods of media change, the earlier systems of interpretation were continued and reformed in relation to the new paradigm. For example, the original oral traditions of the storytellers, prophets and psalmists were reformed for the culture of writing as texts which were read aloud in public readings and interpreted in doctrinal preaching and teaching. Thus, in the paradigm of the Bible in television, 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. Therefore, the medium of interpretation of the electronic Bible will be a media mix of oral, written and electronic elements.

THE PROBLEM OF A HERMENEUTIC FOR THE BIBLE ON TELEVISION

The most complex issue is the way in which meaningful connections will be made in television between the contemporary world and the world of the Bible. 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? To this point the basic approach to the Bible on television has been to focus on the theological meaning of the texts.

The medium of communications establishes certain constraints that operate in the formation of meaning in that medium. In his *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.⁸ In the world of literacy one knows through reflecting on the ideas implicit in sense experience. Knowledge of the real world of the forms comes through reflection on 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.

We would suggest that, in the tradition of biblical interpretation, this epistemological revolution associated with literacy was implemented in the development of theology as the primary hermeneutical system. In its various forms theology has been the way the Christian tradition has made connections between the contemporary world and the world of the Bible. The primary characteristic of theology is critical reflection on the ideas that are identified in

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 of which the Bible is the source.

The question in the context of the Bible and television is whether theology provides a viable hermeneutic in the sound and image medium of television. The depth of the problem is evident when theological discourse is taken from books and oral discourse and put on television. Imagine the grandeur and power of Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* or Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on television or audio tape, or the fascination of Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on the Gospel of John in a televised exegetical discussion. Everyone recognizes that such program concepts will not work in the medium of television. A transmediation of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa* is not a viable project for television. Yet the mainline churches have produced literally thousands of discussion programs in which the primary format was to bring together representatives of various points of view for a cordial theological discussion. The underlying assumption has been that the interpretive methods that were developed for writing will be equally appropriate for television.

In his chapter in this book on television as a medium for theology, Tyron Inbody has introduced a distinction that is foundational for constructive thinking about this problem. He distinguishes two orders of language about God. "First order" language is the broad category of the languages of faith and witness. These expressions include nonlinguistic idioms such as gestures, dance, music, art and architecture as well as talk about God. "First order" expression of faith and witness about God is found in the myths, stories, poetry, prayer, rhetoric, liturgy, hymns and dogmas of the church. By dogmas he refers to the primary language about God in Christian faith in the confessions of the church in which "I believe" is the characteristic introduction.⁹ Theology is then "second order" language which reflects on the primary languages of faith.

There are two dimensions of this distinction that are helpful for this discussion. The first is the relationship between language and experience. "First order" or primary language is more closely related to experience. Many of the primary languages have a performative function. They are the languages in which things are done in the relationship with God and in the faith community, e.g., confession, praise, marriage and communion. The "second order" language of theology is a language of critical reflection that is detached from the immediacy of experience. In relation to television it is clear that the first order languages are more appropriate to the sounds and images of the medium. This does not mean that second order languages are inappropriate. As Inbody rightly argues in his chapter, the second order language of theology has an important role in the medium and culture of television.

The equally important contribution of Inbody's distinction is to clarify the relationship between the various languages in which the church talks about God. As he states, "Theology... is a dependent, derivative, second order language, reliant on the primary language of faith and witness."¹⁰ The implication is that the very possibility of theology itself is dependent on the presence and vitality of the primary languages. Furthermore, one of the roles of theology is to reflect on the content and functions of the primary languages. Hence, narrative theology is critical reflection on the role of narrative in the church's talk about God.

What is then the character of the languages of the Bible? Is the Bible composed of the primary languages of faith and witness or is it critical reflection on the primary languages? The most prevalent language of the traditions of Israel and early Christianity is story;

narrative comprises over half of both testaments. The traditions of prophecy and psalm are poetry and are closely related to the primary languages of proclamation and prayer. The wisdom tradition is primarily composed of proverbs and short sayings. Story, parable, proverbs, poetry, prophecy: all of these languages of the biblical tradition are primary languages.

In the paradigms of biblical interpretation in the world of writing and especially in the paradigm of silent print, the purpose has been to render the primary languages of the Bible into the secondary language of theology. The methods of biblical study have been designed to deconstruct the Bible as story, poetry, proverb and song and to reconstruct them in the form and language of theology. Thus, the most characteristic product of biblical criticism is biblical theology.

But, as Inbody's distinction helps to clarify, if we equate the Bible and its faithful interpretation with theology, we are limiting the languages for television to the secondary language of critical reflection. 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 only broadcast literary, music and film critics on television and never have storytellers, musicians or athletes. Our only offering would be interminable, abstract discussions about stories, music and sports. Our framework of interpretation is then designed to yield information about the second-order language of the ideas of the tradition rather than the first-order language of story, song, proverb and prophecy.

Thus, the primary reason why historical critical scholarship has had virtually no impact on the interpretation of the Bible in the electronic media of radio, audio tape, film and television is that it is not designed for that purpose. The hermeneutics and methods of historical critical scholarship as currently practiced are designed for the transmediation of the Bible into the communications world of silent print. Historical criticism is a paradigm for finding meaning in documents read in silence. To put it another way it will be difficult for us to interpret the biblical tradition in a medium of direct experience of sounds and images if our methods are intended to eliminate sounds and images from our experience. Therefore, we are experiencing a major discontinuity in communications paradigms.

If the primary languages which are closest to experience itself are most compatible with the medium of television and if theology is dependent on the presence and vitality of the primary languages, the first task of the church's work in television is to present the primary languages of the Bible itself. Indeed, the very possibility of doing theology in the medium is dependent on the presence of the primary languages.

A HERMENEUTIC FOR THE BIBLE ON TELEVISION

The general shape of a new hermeneutic for the Bible in television can be identified in this context. This can obviously only comprise an initial proposal. The only way in which it can be tested is by being used in the actual process of interpretation in the medium of television itself.

The first characteristic of this hermeneutic emerges from the distinction between primary and secondary languages. Because of the highly sensory character of the medium of television, the interpretation of the Bible in the medium will need to use the primary languages rather than secondary languages. Rather than the characteristic move in theological interpretation of

moving from the primary language of the text to the secondary language of the idea implicit in the text, interpretation will be built by the use of primary languages. That is, instead of connecting the text with contemporary experience by identifying transcendental truths, this mode of interpretation will build a matrix of connections in the primary languages then and now.

At one level this principle is implicit in some aspects of contemporary Christian television. Most of the programs of the electronic church rely heavily on the primary languages of prayer, song/poetry and story. A program by Jerry Falwell, Robert Schuller or Jimmy Swaggart is linguistically similar. There are songs and hymns, personal stories as witness, prayer and sermon. With the possible exception of the sermon, these are all primary languages. One would need to add to this television list the new primary language of the appeal for money. But, at another level, while these languages are present, they are frequently only marginally used to interpret the Bible. In general the biblical content of these programs is minimal. The scriptures themselves are rarely presented and, if so, in very short texts that are primarily used as proof texts for whatever theme is being developed. Generally the Bible is interpreted in highly selective and anachronistic ways that have connected it with various American conservative causes such as getting rich, success in business, and the build-up of American military defense. Thus, while the programs of the electronic church demonstrate the viability of the use of the primary languages in the medium of television, they do not provide adequate models for the interpretation of the Bible in the medium.

In effect a hermeneutic of the primary languages involves a form of midrash or collection of commentaries. At the most basic level midrash sets stories, proverbs and laws from the contemporary context next to the traditional texts. A midrashic commentary involves making connections to the tradition by both analyzing the text and developing contemporary narrative, proverbial or legal traditions that grow naturally out of the text. But midrash is primarily composed of primary languages. Thus, in the broadest sense the proposal here is that a hermeneutic of the Bible for television can be based on a midrash of the primary languages.

The second dimension of a hermeneutic for the Bible in television emerges from a further analysis of the Bible itself. What is the structure of thought that underlies the biblical tradition? We tend to assume that the structure of biblical thought is theological. But this ignores the basic fact that, when seen in relation to Inbody's distinction, there are no secondary language works that are designed as critical reflection in the Bible.

All of the books of the Bible are written in the primary languages: e.g., story, poetry, prophecy and proverb. The closest to theology are the wisdom traditions of the Old Testament and the Pauline epistles of the New Testament. But the wisdom traditions of the Bible have a literary form and structure that is radically different from any theological essay. And Paul's letters are passionate and often chaotically organized discourses that were written for direct encounter with the congregations. The theological interpretation of the Bible is one of the characteristic products of the patristic period. Only the development of a full orbbed allegorical method of interpretation by forbears such as Origen made it possible to deconstruct the narratives of the Bible into a philosophical/theological system.

But the primary structure of thought in the Bible was based on a narrative rather than a theological framework. The story of the actions of God, past, present and future, provided the basic structure of biblical thought. In fact, as is reflected in the liturgical years of Christianity

and Judaism, that story of God has continued to provide the substructure of both Jewish and Christian thought.

The proposal here is, therefore, that the most viable hermeneutic for the interpretation of the Bible on television is a narrative hermeneutic. Thinking within the framework of the story of God leads naturally to the identification of the connection between the biblical experience of God and contemporary life. Rather than requiring the stepping back from experience that is the characteristic move of theology, a narrative hermeneutic invites a stepping into the connections between biblical and contemporary experience.

In the television productions of the major Protestant churches today, each major denomination has developed a program for the interpretation of their present programs. In the United Methodist Church, for example, it is called "Catch the Spirit." This program is a storytelling program in which the stories of contemporary persons and communities are told. However, as far as we can discover none of the churches has developed any on-going programs of either biblical or theological interpretation. The development of a narrative hermeneutic for the interpretation of the Bible would open up the possibility of linking the story of God in the biblical tradition with the stories of the church's ministry now.

Thus, the outline of a paradigm for the Bible in television has the following components: the development of audio-visual translations based on an understanding of the sounds and images of the Bible; the combination of electronic, written and oral resources in a new media mix for the interpretation of the Bible; the formation of a church owned distribution system; and a hermeneutic based on the primary rather than secondary languages and on a narrative structure of thought.