

DREADING THE WHIRLWIND INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN REVELATION

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Introduction

This article is focused on a major recent development in the study of John's use of the OT in Revelation. Within the last five years significant attention has been directed toward the issue of whether literary-critical categories such as intertextuality are appropriate to the way in which the book of Revelation interacts with the OT. This discussion is being framed by an ongoing debate between Steve Moyise and G. K. Beale. After a brief review of the broader field, specific attention will be given to that debate and its implications for future study of Revelation.

I know of no one who would argue that an understanding of the OT is irrelevant to an understanding of the Apocalypse. When reading the book, one is plunged fully into the atmosphere of the OT.¹ No other book of the NT is as saturated with the OT.² One cannot expect, therefore, to penetrate the symbolism of the book without careful attention to its OT antecedents.

The book seems, on the other hand, to resist efforts to understand its relationship to the OT. Rather than quoting or citing the OT, the book interacts with it in the most allusive manner. A word here and a phrase there, the barest hint of an echo in another place: this is the substance of how Revelation evokes the OT. And that is only the beginning of complications. While there is a general consensus that Revelation was written in Greek,³ there

¹To borrow language from Henri Stierlin, *La vérité sur L'Apocalypse* (Paris: Editions Buchet/Chastel, 1972), 55.

²Pierre Lestrignat suggests that one-seventh of the substance of the Apocalypse is drawn from the words of the OT (*Essai sur l'unité de la révélation biblique* [Paris: Editions "Je Sers," 1942], 148).

³David Tabachovitz, *Die Septuaginta und das Neue Testament*, Skrifter Utgivna av Svenska Institutet I Athen, series 8 vol. 4 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1956), 125-126. See further Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible, vols. 29 and 29a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 1:cxxix; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, no. 25 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 6-8, 38-43.

is much dispute with regard to the language and text tradition of the OT that John utilized.⁴ The difficulty is compounded by the fact that there are a number of striking irregularities in the Greek grammar of the Apocalypse.⁵ So having granted the central place of the OT in the book of Revelation, it is still difficult to determine exactly how it is being used there.

Scholars have sensed that although the Apocalypse is a veritable mosaic of OT words, themes, and passages, the end result is something entirely new.⁶ This creativity requires interpreters to consider what kind of "exegetical" method the author of Revelation employs when he draws on the language of the OT.⁷ Other documents of the NT, where direct quotations enable us to gain a clear picture of the author's exegetical method, reveal that early Christian writers made use of a number of different ancient approaches to the

⁴Selected literature reflective of the debate: R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), 1:lxvi; Ugo Vanni, "L'Apocalypse johannique. Etat de la question," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et L'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium, vol. 53, edited by J. Lambrecht (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), 31; Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 27-48; [Leonhard] P. Trudinger, "Some Observations Concerning the Text of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n. s. 17 (1966):82-88; G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of John*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 10-11; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 47. Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1906), cl, clv; Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse et liturgie*, Cahiers Théologiques, 52 (Neuchâtel: Editions Delachaux et Niestlé, 1964), 10; James A. Montgomery, "The Education of the Seer of the Apocalypse," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 45 (1926): 73-74; D. Moody Smith Jr., "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays*, ed. James M. Efrid (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 61; A. Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezékïel dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica* 43 (1962):436-476.

⁵Note the following discussions on this issue: R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 79-102; Heinrich Kraft, "Zur Offenbarung des Johannes," *Theologische Rundschau* 38 (1973):93; G. Mussies, "The Greek of the Book of Revelation," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et L'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium, vol. 53, ed. J. Lambrecht (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), 167-170; idem, *The Morphology*, 6; Tabachovitz, 125-126; Torrey, 13-58. Martin McNamara, for example, points to the Aramaic Targums as the explanation for Rev 1:4 and many other irregularities (*The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, Analecta Biblica, vol. 27a, second printing with supplement [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978], 109-117, 124-125, 189-190).

⁶Rudolf Halver, *Der Mythos im letzten Buch der Bibel*, Theologische Forschung, vol. 32 (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1964), 15.

⁷I use the term "exegetical" here in the sense of how ancient writers approached what they considered to be an inspired text in order to make persuasive use of that text in their own situation and for the sake of their own perceived audience.

OT, approaches for which we have evidence also outside the NT.⁸

The exegetical method most strikingly common between NT writers and their Jewish contemporaries is midrash, in which an author reflects homiletically on Scripture, often making use of detailed analysis of specific texts.⁹ A liturgical method of exegesis (which may have particular relevance for Revelation's liturgical passages) was utilized in the Aramaic Targums to the Hebrew OT text.¹⁰ There is also a method we could call "typological exegesis," where an author invites ancient readers to see analogies between the situations of Israel's past and their own situation. In typological exegesis persons, institutions, and/or events described in an earlier text can be regarded as models or prefigurations of later persons, institutions, or events.¹¹

⁸For general studies of this subject see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Sources for Biblical Study, vol. 5 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), 16-52, and Daniel Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 22 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975).

⁹My definition is based on that of Renée Bloch, "Midrash," *Supplément au dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. L. Pirot, A. Robert and Henri Cazelles (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1957), 5:1280. In midrashic exegesis, the OT material was used not so much to bolster the authority of the exegete as to update the OT message in the light of contemporary understandings and situations. An examination of the literature suggests that we do not understand midrashic exegesis sufficiently at this point to fully understand the role it may play in the book of Revelation. Important discussions of the use of midrash in the NT include G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); E. Earle Ellis, "Midrash, Targum and New Testament Quotations," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 61-69; Lars Hartman, "Scriptural Exegesis in the Gospel of Matthew and the Problem of Communication," in *L'évangile selon Matthieu*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972), 131-152, note especially Hartman's comment on p. 133; Merrill P. Miller, "Targum, Midrash and the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 2 (1971): 29-82. For a perspective on the use of midrash in Early Judaism see Jacob Neusner, *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism*, The Foundations of Judaism: Method, Teleology, Doctrine, pt. 1: Method (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially 1-21.

¹⁰Through the Aramaic Targums and the LXX, NT writers had already inherited what we could call an "interpreted Bible." Important discussions of targumic exegesis and the NT include Roger le Déaut, "Targumic Literature and New Testament Interpretation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4 (1974):243-289; Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, Analecta Biblica, vol. 27a, second printing with supplement (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); and Daniel Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 22 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 65-81.

¹¹Major studies on this topic include Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); David L. Baker, "Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1975):137-157; Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1981); Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in*

While various aspects of the above have been addressed in scores of books, articles, and commentaries since the middle of the 1980s, a number of major specialized works have addressed the larger picture. According to G. K. Beale,¹² the most significant of these works are those of Beale,¹³ Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang,¹⁴ Jon Paulien,¹⁵ Richard Bauckham,¹⁶ Jan Fekkes,¹⁷ and Jean-Pierre Ruiz.¹⁸ These works all focused on John's intentions with regard to his use of the OT. In spite of the allusive nature of the evidence, attempts were made to catalog John's choices of OT texts to allude to and consider the impact of such allusions on his purposes for the book.¹⁹ Increasing attention was also given to the criteria for determining when and where the author intentionally alluded to portions of the OT. These concerns seemed weighty enough and problematic enough to engage teams of scholars for generations to come. But the enterprise has been further complicated by the arrival of new literary approaches to the topic.

This new direction was signaled by the research of Devorah Dimant on the use of the OT in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.²⁰ Her research led

Prophecy (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983), 35-55; Roland E. Murphy, "Christian Understanding of the Old Testament," *Theology Digest* 18 (1970):321-332; and Jack Weir, "Analogous Fulfillment," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 9 (1982):65-76.

¹²G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup, 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 13-59.

¹³G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

¹⁴Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985).

¹⁵Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Allusions and the Interpretation of Rev 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1988).

¹⁶Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993).

¹⁷J. Fekkes, *III Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup, 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

¹⁸Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16, 17-19, 10*, European University Studies, series 23, vol. 376 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989).

¹⁹All of the specialized works address these issues to one degree or another.

²⁰Devorah Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 381-384. My attention was drawn to Dimant's work by the article of Louis Painchaud, "Use of Scripture in Gnostic Literature," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4:2 [1996]:129-

her to the conclusion that these Jewish writers utilized the OT in two distinct ways that she categorizes as “compositional use” and “expositional use.”²¹ According to her, these two categories represent “fundamentally different attitudes to the biblical material,” leading to correspondingly different literary genres and styles.²²

Dimant defines “expositional use” as a literary strategy in which the OT text is presented explicitly, with a clear external marker.²³ In expositional use the biblical text is introduced in order to be the object of interpretation.²⁴ The aim of the writing is to explain the biblical text. This usually involves a fixed terminology and special syntactical patterns, in order to separate the biblical element from the author’s exposition. Genres utilizing this category include rabbinic midrash, Qumranic *pesher*, the commentaries on the Torah by Philo, and certain types of quotations in the NT.²⁵

“Compositional use,” on the other hand, occurs when the biblical elements are interwoven into the work without external formal markers.²⁶ The biblical element is subservient to the independent aim and structure of its new context. Genres employing compositional use do not have the same exegetical or rhetorical aims as exposition, but instead create a new and independent text. The biblical material becomes part of the texture of these works. Typical compositional genres include narratives, psalms, testaments, and wisdom discourses, which use biblical elements for their own patterns, style, and terminology.²⁷

While Dimant does not mention apocalyptic among the genres in which compositional use is employed, studies in Revelation clearly demonstrate that John was utilizing the OT compositionally rather than expositionally. While

146), which I became aware of thanks to a conversation with Leonard Thompson.

²¹Ibid., 382-383.

²²Ibid., 382.

²³This would seem to correspond to what I call a citation of which a number of instances can be seen in the Gospel of Matthew, for example (Paulien, 102). Some have called these citations in Matthew “Formula Quotations.” Cf. Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 102; Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 226.

²⁴Dimant notes that similar distinctions have been made by Heinemann and Perrot; cf. Dimant, 382, n. 16.

²⁵Dimant, 382-383.

²⁶This corresponds roughly to the categories of direct allusion and echo what I worked with in my dissertation on Revelation (Paulien, 175-178).

²⁷Dimant, 382-383.

a handful of scholars argue for anywhere from one to eleven "quotations" of the OT in the book of Revelation,²⁸ the overwhelming majority of scholars conclude that there are none.²⁹ And there are certainly no explicit citations of the expositional type.³⁰ If Dimant's observations can be verified within the context of NT studies, therefore, they would have large implications for our understanding of John's use of the OT.³¹ Regardless of the degree to which other NT writers respect the context of their OT antecedents,³² the author of Revelation may be signaling a generic preference for creativity in his use of Scripture.

Recent Developments

While Dimant's distinctions and their potential significance seem not to have impacted on studies of Revelation so far, the debate regarding John's use of the OT in Revelation broke new ground with the published monograph by Steve Moyise in 1995.³³ Moyise provides the first serious

²⁸See, for example, Robert G. Bratcher, ed., *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1967), 74-76; Johann Christian Carl Döpke, *Hermeneutik der neutestamentlichen Schriftsteller* (Leipzig: Friedrich Christian Wilhelm Vogel, 1829), 288; David McCalman Turpie, *The New Testament View of the Old* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 323.

²⁹Selected examples: Kurt Aland, et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3d ed. (NY: United Bible Societies, 1975), 903; Werner Foerster, "Bemerkungen zur Bildsprache der Offenbarung Johannis," in *Verborum Veritas: Festschrift für Gustav Stählin*, ed. Otto Böcher and Klaus Haacker (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1970), 225; Roger Nicole, "A Study of the Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament with Reference to the Doctrine of the Inspiration of the Scriptures" (M.S.T. Thesis, Gordon College of Theology and Missions, 1940), passim; Ernest Leslie Peerman, *Living Messages from Patmos* (NY: Pyramid Press, 1941), 51; Pierre Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, *Commentaire du Nouveau Testament*, second series, vol. 14 (Lausanne: Delachaux et Niestlé), 368; Jürgen Roloff, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, *Zürcher Biblekommentare NT*, vol. 18 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984), 20; F. Stagg, "Interpreting the Book of Revelation," *Review and Expositor* 72 (1975): 333; Henry B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 392; R.V.G. Tasker, *The Old Testament in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1946), 168; Vanhoye, 436-437; Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 42.

³⁰The only "citation" of the OT occurs in Rev 15:3, the "song of Moses," which seems an evident reference to Exod 15. But the content of the "song" in Rev 15:3-4 is a mosaic of language from the Psalms and the prophets, not Exodus. There are, therefore, no citations of the OT of the expositional type.

³¹Cf. the detailed evidence for Dimant's theory in Dimant, 384-419.

³²Beale offers a representative anthology of the literature on this topic with some bias in favor of respect for context. G. K. Beale, ed., *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

³³Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup, 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Beale chose to review Moyise in *John's Use* precisely because

attempt to apply the literary perspective of intertextuality to the use of the OT in Revelation.³⁴ Working inductively, he argues that the intertextual approach is appropriate to the study of Revelation.

Traditional studies of allusion in NT scholarship were interested primarily in the "influence" of the OT as scripture upon the NT writers and the resulting documents.³⁵ Intertextuality broadens the process by a concern for the impact of the reader on the process of intertextual interpretation.

Moyise was the first to apply postmodern hermeneutical perspectives to the debates surrounding John's use of the OT. G. K. Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of The Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," *Irish Biblical Studies* 21 (1999): 152.

I have not included Beale's 1994 book on the NT use of the OT, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?*, because it is an anthology of earlier works on the general subject of the degree to which NT writers respected the original context of the OT writers. That volume contains an excellent short summary of Beale's perspective, published at greater length in his monograph of 1998 and his commentary of 1999.

³⁴Literary approaches to the book of Revelation have been around for about fifteen years, beginning with the work of David Barr in the mid-1980s (David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis," *Interpretation* 38 [1984]: 39-50; "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40 [1986]: 243-256; *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1998]). Note also the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries, ed. Gerhard Krodel [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], and Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992]). Barr argued for a more oral and narrative approach to the book in contrast to its critical analysis as a historical document. In doing so he helped open the field to literary and social approaches to the book. In 1990, under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature, he guided the establishment of the "Literary Criticism and the Apocalypse Consultation," which was replaced after two years by the "Reading the Apocalypse Seminar." The two groups were largely made up of younger scholars eager to move the debate forward.

The purpose of the seminar was to explore the "intersection between literary and social readings of the Apocalypse." I sense that Barr was hoping to avoid the quagmires of both precritical and critical readings of the Apocalypse and develop some consensus among those advocating more contemporary approaches to the book. As the years went by, however, I sensed his increasing frustration as the fifteen to twenty members of the group seemed to fragment in a variety of directions: literary, structuralist, feminist, rhetorical, theological, liturgical, and so on. The publication of a couple of books that would highlight a variety of reader responses to Revelation is still in process.

With regard to the issue that has exercised Beale and Moyise, the group seemed to divide almost 50/50 between those who prefer to retain an interest in the original author's intention, and those who are primarily interested in how contemporary readers respond to the book. The work of the group did not cover the area of intertextuality, however, so I have not chosen to highlight its literary critical work in this article.

³⁵Willem S. Vorster, "Intertextuality and Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, ed. Sipke Draisma (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989), 18-22.

According to Moyise, “the task of intertextuality is to explore how the source text continues to speak through the new work and how the new work forces new meanings from the source text.”³⁶ “By absorbing words used in one context into a new context or configuration, a metaphorical relationship is established.”³⁷ “The reader ‘hears’ the OT text but its meaning is affected by the new context or configuration.”³⁸ When a reader of Revelation who is not conscious of an allusion reads allusive words in their new context, that reader will naturally read connotations into those words that were not present in the OT context. When the reader becomes aware of the allusion, a “cave of resonant signification”³⁹ is opened up that affects the reading of that part of Revelation.⁴⁰

Moyise then compares the use of the OT in Revelation with Thomas Greene’s four “forms of imitation.”⁴¹ Based on this research he argues that John deliberately leaves his use of OT allusions open-ended. He invites the reader to engage in thought and analysis of his text (Rev 13:8; 17:9). Thus, there may be no gap between the author’s intention for Revelation and the process of reader response to the cave of resonant signification.⁴²

Moyise’s approach was quickly called into question by G. K. Beale in the most comprehensive single work ever written on the subject of allusions to the OT in Revelation.⁴³ The book is not a coherent whole, but reads like a series of independent units written at different times but with a common general purpose. In fact, many of the parts had been published separately.⁴⁴

³⁶Moyise, *The Old Testament*, 111.

³⁷Ibid., 110.

³⁸Ibid., 110-111.

³⁹Quoted from John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 65.

⁴⁰Moyise, *The Old Testament*, 118.

⁴¹Ibid., 118-132. Based on Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 16-53. Greene’s four categories are reproductive, eclectic, heuristic, and dialectic. Moyise concludes that there is nothing in Revelation that could fairly be described as reproductive, and little that fits the eclectic category (Moyise, *The Old Testament*, 120-123). The heuristic and dialectic categories seem worthy of exploration with regard to Revelation (ibid., 123-132).

⁴²Ibid., 133-134.

⁴³G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup, 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁴⁴The sources of the book are detailed in James E. West’s review of G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, in *Review of Biblical Literature*, found at <www.bookreviews.org/Reviews/1850758948>.

The main purpose of the book seems to be an extension of the thesis that drove Beale's 1994 anthology.⁴⁵ Beale argues that John uses the OT with sensitivity to its original context. The OT is not just the servant of the gospel, as Barnabas Lindars has expressed it, but also a guide. In other words, NT writers did not simply impose their understanding on the OT text; it also became a source of their understanding of the events they had experienced.

Beale develops the analogy of a basket of fruit to express his viewpoint. He argues that while an apple in a basket of fruit has been removed from its original context, it has not lost its identity as an apple. It has simply been placed in a new context. So when NT writers quote the OT, they are placing such texts in a new context and giving them new significance within that new context, but they are not altering what the original writer meant.⁴⁶ While others have articulated such a viewpoint with respect to the NT as a whole,⁴⁷ no one else has articulated it in such detail with regard to Revelation.⁴⁸ Beale considers his position in serious disagreement with Moyise.⁴⁹

In a short response article Moyise expressed puzzlement regarding this disagreement.⁵⁰ He feels that Beale's distinction between meaning and significance is a hermeneutical coverup.⁵¹ He went ahead to articulate a threefold difference between his position and that of Beale: (1) They differ over whether or not NT writers give OT texts new meanings; Moyise believes they do. (2) They differ over whether or not NT authors take OT texts out of context; Moyise believes they do. (3) Beale insists that meaning derives solely from an author's intention; Moyise believes that meaning also derives from the creative processes of readers.⁵²

Moyise prefers the analogy of a fruit salad to Beale's fruit basket. In

⁴⁵"The Right Doctrine From the Wrong Texts?" The book, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, is an expansion of the ideas laid out in Beale's chapter of the anthology: "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," 257-276.

⁴⁶Beale, *John's Use*, 51-52.

⁴⁷In Beale's anthology, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?*, Beale includes articles favoring respect for context by C. H. Dodd, I. Howard Marshall, Beale himself, and David Secombe.

⁴⁸I have benefited from the brief summary of Beale's *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, by Kenneth Newport in *Review of Biblical Literature* found at <www.bookreviews.org/Reviews/1850758948>.

⁴⁹Beale, *John's Use*, 50-59.

⁵⁰Steve Moyise, "The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale," *Irish Biblical Studies* 21 (1999):54-58.

⁵¹Ibid., 55.

⁵²Ibid., 54.

a fruit salad there are no more shiny apples, but pieces of apple mixed with other fruits and covered with syrup. While the connection remains between the apple on the tree and the apple in the fruit salad, one is more struck with the differences between the two forms of apple than one is in the fruit-basket analogy.⁵³

Moyise seems to believe that he has been unfairly characterized as a radical reader-response critic who believes that a text can mean whatever a reader wants it to mean.⁵⁴ He argues instead that readers are not free to make a text mean whatever they like, but in order to arrive at a coherent interpretation, readers must make choices regarding what constitutes evidence and how it should be construed. He feels that the differences between himself and Beale demonstrate that there is no consensus on how to make such choices. More often people such as Beale interpret according to their own presuppositions and presume that they have attained the author's intention.⁵⁵

A few months later Beale responded to Moyise with a vigorous and lengthy defense of his position on authorial intention and respect for context.⁵⁶ He argued that the debate is fundamentally about epistemology, which would require specific book-length treatments.⁵⁷ He sought to summarize the parameters of such a lengthy treatment in his twenty-nine-page article. Beale clarified that his approach is based on the work of E. D. Hirsch, K. J. Vanhoozer, and N. T. Wright.⁵⁸ He argues that while no interpretation ever reproduces an author's original meaning in full, adequate understanding is possible.⁵⁹ While understanding can never be fully certain, it is not impossible either.⁶⁰ Beale insists on maintaining

⁵³Ibid., 55-56. As Moyise himself acknowledges, both analogies break down as attempts to explain what is happening in the interpretation of texts. Regardless of how it is interpreted, the original text remains intact. Once removed from a tree, however, an apple can never be replaced. The tree is fundamentally changed by the "interpretation," whether it is a fruit basket, a fruit salad, or applesauce that results!

⁵⁴He expresses some doubt that such radical reader-response critics actually exist (ibid., 57).

⁵⁵Ibid., 57-58.

⁵⁶G. K. Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of The Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," *Irish Biblical Studies*. 21 (1999): 152-180.

⁵⁷Ibid., 153, 173.

⁵⁸E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), passim.

⁵⁹Beale, "Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," 155.

⁶⁰Beale takes up Wright's analogy of the historian (ibid., 161). Historians do not record

Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance.⁶¹ He considers it critical that good interpretation be judged by the degree to which it conforms to essential elements of the author's original meaning.⁶²

I sense a certain amount of frustration in Beale's response article. He believes that Moyise's own statements rank him with the more radical reader-response critics that can make a text mean whatever they like.⁶³ For Beale this is an unnecessary abandonment of "commonsense," which implies that the probability of one interpretation being superior to another consists in the degree to which there are fundamental correspondences between that interpretation and its source text.⁶⁴

With regard to respect for context, Beale lays out a number of arguments against Moyise's position: (1) In a number of instances it can be demonstrated that NT writers did interpret an OT text in harmony with its original intention. (2) Twenty years of detailed research have led Beale to the conclusion that John generally and consistently uses the OT with significant recognition of its context. (3) When NT writers do shift from the exegetical meaning, they often do so using presuppositions that are rooted already in the OT itself. (4) Allegory, as a method, is not found in the NT; therefore its writers were not haphazard in their methodology.⁶⁵ He notes that Moyise has done little exegesis of Revelation in the public arena and implies that the burden of proof is on him to show that the results of Beale's textual observations are incorrect.⁶⁶

Beale also challenges Moyise to show that his rejection of authorial intention is not part and parcel of a rejection of a faith-based perspective on the claims of Scripture.⁶⁷ Ultimately texts need to be approached from a "hermeneutic of love" which avoids the twisting of another author's perspective to serve one's own selfish ends or to caricature the other's position to enhance one's own.⁶⁸ A "loving" approach to Scripture would be to take seriously its claim to a comprehensive world view in which ultimately

events fully as they actually happened. Neither are they unable to record anything that happened. Wright calls this "critical realism."

⁶¹Ibid., 155-159.

⁶²Ibid., 159.

⁶³Ibid., 162-163, 173-174.

⁶⁴Ibid., 164-166, 175-178.

⁶⁵Ibid., 167-170.

⁶⁶Ibid., 166.

⁶⁷Ibid., 171-172.

⁶⁸Ibid., 178-179.

both OT and NT are the product of a single, divine, authorial purpose.⁶⁹

We gain some insight into Moyise's response to the above from an even more recent article.⁷⁰ He has also responded to me personally by e-mail.⁷¹ Moyise believes that the term "intertextuality" has become a generic label for a lot of different practices in NT scholarship regarding the use of the OT.⁷² Instead of its technical meaning in the world of literature, it has become an umbrella term, requiring the use of subcategories in order to be rightly understood.⁷³

Moyise offers three such categories in the article. The first he calls "intertextual echo." Grounded in the work of Richard Hays,⁷⁴ this approach demonstrates that a particular allusion or echo can be more important to the meaning of a text than its minor role in the wording might indicate.⁷⁵ The second category he proposes is "dialogical intertextuality." In this category the interaction between text and subtext operates in both directions.⁷⁶ The third proposed category is "postmodern intertextuality." Postmodern intertextuality seeks to demonstrate that the process of tracing the interactions between texts is inherently unstable. While meaning can result from interpretation, it happens only when some portions of the evidence are privileged and other portions are ignored.⁷⁷ While Beale would appear to be comfortable with the first two categories,⁷⁸ it is the third that troubles him. Beale's great fear, according to Moyise, is the suggestion that readers "create" meaning.⁷⁹

Moyise attempts to bridge the gap by elaborating "postmodern

⁶⁹Ibid., 165.

⁷⁰Steve Moyise, "Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North*, JSNTSup 189, ed. Steve Moyise (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁷¹Friday, August 4, 2000.

⁷²Moyise, North festschrift, 16.

⁷³Ibid., 17.

⁷⁴Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁷⁵Moyise, North festschrift, 17.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., 17-18.

⁷⁸After all, for him the OT is both servant and guide to the writers of the NT. Among many occurrences of this expression in Beale note *John's Use*, 127, in context.

⁷⁹Moyise, North festschrift, 31.

intertextuality” in the light of John 4:16-20.⁸⁰ He is aware that many will ask the question: “What possible benefit is it to show that all interpretations are inherently flawed?”⁸¹ He offers three answers to the question: (1) Postmodern intertextuality is not saying that meaning, in the sense of communication, is impossible, but that it always comes at a price. Interpretation is not arbitrary, but the openness of texts like John 4:16-20 allows for interpretational choice. (2) In showing that a text can point in a number of directions one reveals something about the potentiality of the text. There is more than one valid reading possible. All readings based on genuine potential within the text tell us something about the text as it really is. This is different from making a text mean whatever one likes. (3) Since it is clearly impossible for any one individual to perfectly grasp the meaning of a text, particularly a text like Revelation, it seems to Moyise inescapable that postmodern intertextuality must be true “*to some degree*” (emphasis original).

Moyise concludes with a fresh analogy, this time from the world of music. Every performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony will be different. Regardless of the extent of the differences, however, there will be no doubt that one is hearing Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and not his Sixth. The differences are real and worthy of study since they affect one’s enjoyment of the performance, but they should not be used to suggest that one can do nothing about the symphony! Likewise, postmodern intertextuality can contribute a great deal to our understanding of text without eliminating all meaning or understanding.⁸²

In his e-mail, Moyise suggests four points of difference between himself and Beale: (1) He is attempting to describe the product that John has produced; Beale seeks to describe the author’s intention for that product. (2) Moyise sees himself in the middle between Beale, who sees John as a serious exegete of the OT, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who sees John “using scripture as a language arsenal for rhetorical purposes.”⁸³ (3) Beale believes that John’s four “presuppositional lenses” produce a true meaning for the text; Moyise sees those various lenses providing the basis for multiple readings of the text, none having preference over the others. (4) Moyise sees himself as seeking to describe texts as dynamic entities, interacting with each other; he believes that

⁸⁰Whether one blames the Samaritan woman for exploiting the six men in her life or the men for exploiting her depends on the standpoint from which one views the text. The text itself is silent on the matter, invoking the reader’s involvement.

⁸¹Moyise, North festschrift, 37-40.

⁸²Ibid., 40.

⁸³This entire paragraph is drawn from the e-mail of Steve Moyise to Jon Paulien on August 4, 2000. I use quotations when I reproduce Moyise’s exact wording.

Beale is describing “a static reality, how things are.” Moyise allows for the possibility that these differences might reflect differences in personality—Beale has more of an either/or approach (my words) to textual options by nature, and Moyise has a natural preference for a both/and approach (again my words).

Making Sense of the Debate

It is difficult to say how much the discussion between Beale and Moyise is semantic or real.⁸⁴ In some ways it seems to be a replay of the epistemological debate framed by Hirsch on the one hand and Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida on the other.⁸⁵ Beale and Moyise are each defending against perceived extremes of the other which they believe, if left unchecked, would undermine their own contribution to scholarship. Each, to some degree, seems to be reacting to a caricature of the other’s position. Beale fears the rebirth of allegory, which he would understand as the indiscriminate “creation of meaning” when interpreting texts. Moyise also fears allegory, which he would understand as the indiscriminate bias of interpreters who pick and choose textual evidence that fits their presuppositional lenses and then declare that their resulting generalizations reflect the author’s intention.

Beale is afraid that in approaching texts without the goal of attaining the author’s intention, interpreters will be mired in a sea of subjectivity where any interpretation of the text will be of equal validity. Moyise, on the other hand, is concerned that we pay serious attention to literary critics who caution against arbitrary and totalizing interpretations that draw their authority from overconfidence in having attained the author’s authoritative intention. Could it be that this is one of those times when both sides are right, at least in part? Read separately, one can easily get the impression that the issue between them is life and death. Read together, one wonders at times if it is much ado about

⁸⁴At the root of the debate seems to be the “meaning of meaning.” Beale defines “meaning” as “the intention of the author.” Moyise defines “meaning” as “communication.”

⁸⁵E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); idem, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). For a general introduction to the complexities of Derrida’s thought see Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). On the relationship between Heidegger and Derrida see Herman Rapaport, *Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992). On the tension between the thought of Hirsch and Derrida see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

nothing. While both seem to agree that the nature of the issue is difficult to grasp, my impression is that each is right in what he affirms, but wrong in what he denies.

Does anyone, even Beale, seriously argue that indisputable and complete access to an author's intention can be achieved, even by the author? Does anyone, including Beale, seriously argue that NT writers were doing academic exegesis when they "respected the context" of OT antecedents? On the other hand, does anyone, including Moyise, seriously think that all interpretations are equally valid (that the seven seals could be seriously interpreted as aquatic animals, for example)?⁸⁶ Do any literary critics seriously apply such an extreme view of reader response to their students' papers? Are life and death issues really at stake here?

When the debate is approached from a positive direction rather than a "hermeneutic of suspicion," Beale and Moyise don't seem so far apart. My sense is that if Moyise were to write a commentary, it would not differ hugely from Beale's. The differences between them may be more on points of emphasis than a serious divide. It seems to me that the real division between Beale and Moyise arises from another place. While Hirsch's defense of authorial intention makes a lot of sense to me, I'm not sure he would agree with the specific use that Beale has made of his work in relation to Revelation. Let me explain.

If by "meaning" we are speaking of an author's intention, how can NT writers be said to respect the original meaning and intention of Jeremiah as a human author, for example? They are clearly not "exegeting" Jeremiah in the sense that we would do so today. New Testament writers had an immediate and pragmatic purpose in their use of the OT, rather than a scientific, descriptive, and exegetical one. When they studied the OT, they were not driven by the need to understand the human intentions of an Ezekiel or a Jeremiah, but by the desire to be more effective in communicating the gospel as they understood it.⁸⁷ At the same time, they were not reckless in their reading, as Beale has pointed out. They were operating under consistent principles and assumptions that were not radically different from those of similar groups in the Jewish environment of the Roman world.

I believe that Beale is right when he says that the NT writers respect the larger context of OT writings, given two realities: (1) They are reading

⁸⁶My appreciation to Leonard Thompson ("Mooring the Revelation in the Mediterranean," a paper presented to the annual meeting of the Reading the Apocalypse Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 23, 1992) for the pointed illustration.

⁸⁷Norman R. Ericson, "The NT Use of the OT: A Kerygmatic Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987):338.

OT writers in terms of the total context of "Scripture" as they perceived it, not primarily in terms of an individual writer's intention for a specific time and place; and (2) they were reading the OT from the perspective of where they understood themselves to be in the context of a divine plan for history. Given the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of a divine plan announced in the context of Scripture as a whole, the NT writings are a reasonable and contextual reflection on that whole, as C. H. Dodd among others has pointed out.⁸⁸ New Testament writers were offering an interpretation of the OT that they believed the OT writers would have given had they been alive to encounter Jesus.

Here is where I think the disconnect is based. For Beale the "author's intention" is not limited to the perspective of the individual OT author, but includes the divine superintendence and authorship of Scripture as a whole. So his approach to the NT use of the OT is normative, comprehensive, and global. For Moyise, on the other hand, the concept of "author's intention" is limited to what a human writer intended at a specific turn of events in history. His approach to the OT text, therefore, is descriptive, immediate, and local. Given these differing definitions, it is not surprising that Beale and Moyise would disagree on whether or not NT writers respected the context of the OT.

Beale seems to imply, therefore, that the divide between him and Moyise is grounded in a different faith perspective.⁸⁹ He accepts the idea of divine superintendence in Scripture; Moyise (by implication) does not. While I have no idea from what faith perspective Moyise is coming, if any, I do not believe that this assumption is accurate. Even faith-based scholars would in most cases agree that there is a human element in the Scriptures and that this human element is an important aspect of the scriptural message. A believer in the divine superintendence of Scripture can also be interested in the human writer's intention, without denying the more global insights of a Dodd or a Beale. I believe that what we are dealing with, then, is more a matter of semantics than a real divide.

I must admit that I am naturally attracted to Hirsch's position and, therefore, that of Beale. It seems to me that all genuine human knowledge is a reflection of past experience. Our own personal experiences are expanded by the experiences of others, which we can gather through conversation, observation, and reading. The collective wisdom of the human race comes to us in books and other media. For us to truly learn from reading, it is

⁸⁸I have wondered at times whether Moyise discounts this "christocentric" principle in the NT too much. See, for example, his thoughts on presuppositional lenses in an as-yet-unpublished article entitled, "The Use of Analogy in Biblical Studies."

⁸⁹Beale, "Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," 165, 171-172.

imperative that we go beyond our own impressions of the text and ascertain something of the understanding and intention of the author. The experiences of others will be worthless to me unless they are, to some degree, understood and appreciated. The human race progresses from generation to generation as the learning, experience, and values of earlier generations are accurately passed on. An understanding and appreciation of authorial intention, therefore, seems to me a critical part of this process.

That there is a strong element of common sense in the previous paragraph is underscored for me by the very debate we are summarizing here. Moyise is just as eager as Beale to understand the intention of the other and also to be understood. He expresses frustration at Beale's lack of comprehension of what he is trying to express. He also is concerned about the misuse of the term "intertextuality" within NT scholarship.⁹⁰ "Reader response" as a literary approach is very compelling in the abstract, but when one's own work is at stake at a practical level, one's intentions as an author resist open-ended interpretation as if by reflex.

Having said this, I have come to appreciate that we cannot live as though Derrida (or Moyise) had never existed.⁹¹ Far too often authoritative appropriations of Scripture or other significant texts are based not on careful exegesis but on presupposition-laden "reader responses," treated as accurate reflections of the text's intent. The ground of such readings has often been the drive for power and control more than faithfulness to the authoritative text. Calling attention to such abuse of texts is a valuable contribution to human experience. By increasing our awareness of human limitations to understanding, and of the effect that readers have on texts, literary critics have instilled a greater degree of humility into the process of interpretation. While I find Beale's fears understandable, Moyise's brief scholarly contributions to the exegesis of Revelation thus far have been insightful and not far different from the kind of work Beale has done. Learning to profit from the experiences of others, therefore, not only requires us to seek authorial intention but also to learn the limits of our ability to learn. The ultimate goal, authentic existence, can be enhanced by both attention to authorial purpose and attention to reader limitations.⁹²

⁹⁰Moyise, North festschrift, 15-17.

⁹¹Kirsten Nielsen, "Shepherd, Lamb, and Blood: Imagery in the Old Testament—Use and Reuse," *Studia Theologica: Scandinavian Journal of Theology* 46 (1992): 126.

⁹²Kirsten Nielsen offers a fascinating observation that mediates the divide in a unique way for the study of Revelation. She argues that in a book such as Revelation, where allusion is central to the imagery, the concepts of authorial intention and reader response come together. In other words, whenever we are dealing with allusion, we are dealing with an author that is also a reader (ibid., 126-127). The author of an allusive text begins as reader of

I would conclude that Beale and Moyise have brought to the topic two sides of a necessary dichotomy. Both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of retrieval⁹³ are needed and provide a necessary balance for interpretation. While a given interpreter may prefer to spend more time on one side or the other of the dichotomy, awareness of both sides is valuable to developing understanding. We grope toward a better understanding of existence, including an understanding of each other's texts and purposes. We all want to be understood and to make a contribution to the human endeavor. We all want our ideas and intentions to be heard and taken seriously. At the same time we must acknowledge that authorial intention will always remain a goal of interpretation. We will not fully arrive; seeking authorial intention will always be a process. As long as human existence goes on, we will continue to raise questions and strive to understand.

an earlier text. For Nielsen, then, "we cannot proclaim the death of the author without proclaiming the death of the reader, because every author is a reader as well. And conversely, if we claim the existence of the reader, we must accept the author as well" (127).

⁹³I was intrigued by this pair of phrases in a listserv reply to David Barr by Ian Paul at <rev-list@sunsite.auc.dk> on August 24, 2000. Paul stated there that the language was based on the work of Paul Ricoeur.