

Jesus the Exegete:

A study of Mark 12: 26-27

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Dedication

To my wife Sunmi, who has loved enough to lose her love, twice these 23 years.

*The gates of heaven are lightly locked,/ We do not guard our gain,/ The heaviest
hind may easily/ Come silently and suddenly/ Upon me in a lane.*

*And any little maid that walks/ In good thoughts apart,/ May break the guard of
the Three Kings/ And see the dear and dreadful things/ I hid within my heart.*

*The meanest man in grey fields gone/ Behind the set of sun,/ Heareth between star
and other star,/ Through the door the darkness fallen ajar,/ The council, eldest of things
that are, / The talk of the Three in One.*

G.K. Chesterton, The Ballad of the White Horse (1911)

1. Introduction:

The exegetical enterprise is safe for neither the uninitiated nor the professional, because it is an exercise involving all three of the holy things: God, man and language. For one definition of the holy is that it is self-realizing, self-defining, self-observing, self-actualized, *sui generis*, or in shorthand, recursive.¹ Now strictly speaking, only God is *sui generis*, but inasmuch as modernism divorces science from purpose or God, we can say that scientifically, language and man are both also.

Of course God is recursively defined, as in the Ex. 3:14 example of the burning bush, when asked His name replied “I am the I am.” You or I might use our profession (physicist), or our relationships (father), but God cannot do either without either divinizing them, or humanizing Himself. With a little reflection, we can see that this same difficulty applies to language and man, for how can we use something else to define language without making it language, or how can we define what makes us man without anthropomorphizing it?

For what separates man from apes is not genes, nor civilization, though of course these play a role, but that he knows himself, that he knows he knows. The emergence of “self” is one of the deep mysteries of neuroscience, and despite the best efforts of reductionist Materialism, has resisted all attempts to recreate it (say, in a computer program) or even subdivide it into more manageable units (e.g., Freud).² In quite interrelated ways, language is also aware of itself. A dictionary defines its words with other words, also found in the dictionary. Perhaps, in children's dictionaries there might

¹Robert Sheldon “The Holy Part 1” at http://procrustes.blogtownhall.com/2008/07/01/the_holy_part_1.shtml accessed on 25 Sept 2008.

²Paul Davies “The Mind of God The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World” New York: Touchstone 1992.

be found pictures, but these are rare and usually associated with nouns, but peruse any technical or theological dictionary, and pictures are nonexistent yet the vocabulary is uniform and informative despite having been defined recursively.

Therefore hermeneutics, the science of exegesis, of interpreting the words of God,³ carries a triply recursive role: it interacts with text using text, it interacts with man using man (intellect, *sitz im leben*), and it interacts with God using God (ethics, metaphysics). Accordingly, the pitfalls are not just numerous but deadly, for the text will not survive exegesis that changes the text, any more than man will survive exegesis that changes his self, or than God will tolerate exegesis that changes God.

Now it would seem to be a fair assumption of modernist exegetes that they desire to get at the one real truth, the one true meaning of the text, however, we live in a post-modernist era when no single meaning of the text is expected or sought for. Rather than debate this post-modern position, we baldly assert that if Christ be the Incarnate Word, then the goal of exegesis is Christ: undifferentiated, undivided, and united with God. Therefore it would seem that our exegetical goals should be unchanged from that of the Reformers--discerning the unitary truth of Scripture and its manifold applications to our lives.

But if it be fair to say that Protestant denominations are distinguished by exegesis (rather than, say, by praxis), then it should be apparent that many exegetical solutions have been found to the unitary word. If we consider Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish exegesis, then we find widely divergent answers to the questions of sin, guilt and atonement, all based on the same Scriptures. As we said before, these recursive endeavors are particularly deadly when they involve us in matters of salvation and damnation, for

we are like as not to find solutions that exonerate ourselves and by explicit and implicit recursion, reinforce our exegesis to the exclusion of the Triune truth.⁴

There have been many approaches to this knotty problem, we list only two so as to justify the remainder of this paper. One approach is to minimize the use of recursive argument, to regain the necessary and logical conclusions that are derived linearly from the text as a nail is driven by a hammer. This was the method favored by the Reformers, and crystallized by the Enlightenment as the Grammatical-Historical Method (and its many progeny of Source, Form, Redaction criticism). Another method, used two paragraphs above, is to hold up spiritual or noble goals as the end-point of exegesis, and take only steps that led toward that noble end, as a candle draws moths, or a restaurant draws patrons.⁵ This was the method favored by Philo and applied by Origen as the Allegorical method, and in watered-down form is found in Typological, Theological, or Mystical methods. We might say of these two approaches that the first sanctifies the means and the second the ends, but as the Reformers said often, only the text is sanctified not the methods, dooming all outcomes to the vulgar.

This is not the place to list all the historical attempts to overcome this dilemma, to find a holy hermeneutic by objectifying through logic, or subjectifying through allegory, or even sanctifying the machinery, as if finding a method used by Jesus provides a holy steamroller. For a recursive, holy thing cannot be pressed through the rollers of linear logic and made into an objective proof any more than a Moebius strip can be made to have two sides, that is, without breaking the very thing one seeks to understand. For

³Louis Berkhof "Principles of Biblical Interpretation," 11-13, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950.

⁴Cornelius Van Till "Apologetics", 62, Philipsburg :Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co. 1976. Also , Mickelson, 19, 1963.

recursion has a different logic, a different function, a different topology than either the drive-shaft of the grammatical-historical method or the rope of the allegorical method. So it should not be surprising that little unity has been achieved in the 500 years since the Reformation brought us back to the Scriptures, for the paradigm of the Enlightenment has been the linear, logical rationality of God, Man and the Word.

Given this failure of the Enlightenment hermeneutic to recover the unity of exegesis, it is vital for the 21st century Post-Modern exegete to find a way to save the text from the centripetal fragmentation of a multi-cultural hermeneutic, where each exegete has his allegorical pole star of interpretive desire. In looking for solutions to this inherently recursive endeavor, it is of the utmost significance that there be only three holy things, and each of them another trinity. For just as recursion is the death of objectivity, so Trinity is the life of recursion.

That is, when the output of an electrical op-amp is put back into the input (recursion) the result can be dramatic, leading to saturation, oscillations and behavior not possible for a feed-forward network (without recursion). The same is true of computers (von Neumann's Turing machine), the indeterminacy of recursive computer programs, the output of double-diffusion chemistry, of non-linear partial-differential equations, of cellular replication, and a host of examples from the natural sciences. It is not just that recursion changes the solutions to a problem, but that for many problems, the solution is not possible without recursion.

To take a simple, yet profound example, we have only been able to achieve "cloning" by stealing the machinery of a nascent baby, by removing the unfertilized

⁵See point four of Dan McCartney, "The New Testament's use of the Old" 103, in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvey Conn, 1988.

haploid nucleus out of the meiotic egg, and replacing with a diploid nucleus from a somatic cell, thereby “tricking” the egg into thinking it was fertilized. We cannot clone without an egg cell, which is like saying we can't make artificial vanilla without vanilla beans, or playdough without flour. And this is because DNA cannot replicate without primed cytoplasmic machinery, and the machinery cannot differentiate without the DNA. It is a classic “chicken and egg” problem, for they are recursively and inseparably dependent.

So far our description focussed on two players, interlocked in mutually supportive ways, which would make one think of a duality, or a complementarity rather than a trinity. Yet even in the deplorable act of cloning, there is a third factor, that of the cytobiologist who does the delicate microsurgery. For the purpose, the initiative, the coherence of the whole process is found outside the process itself. And it is that coherence that makes recursion rise above the mindless repetition of sand dunes in the desert, or the ferny meanderings of frost across a windowpane.⁶ Nor is that coherence, that cytobiologist, merely a stand-in for faceless forces or inevitable chance, but a contributor, a necessary participant in the process. When we consider that the cytobiologist is now composed of somatic cells and was once an egg, we see the circularity of the entire picture. Thus this coherence is a trinity that gives meaning to recursion and makes it holy. (The insurmountable difficulties with cloning are convincing evidence for the miracle of conception, as we dimly begin to perceive why the method

⁶William Dembski, “Intelligent Design: the bridge between science and theology,” Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1999.

with which we were conceived is so important to biology, to society, and to God, for it too is holy.⁷⁾

So we return to our search for a way out of the recursive exegetical swamp that the Enlightenment, “objective,” linear grammatical-historical method has left us. After saying that it is a false hope to think that we can sanctify a method by attributing it to Christ, we will attempt to do that very thing in this paper. But like putting on socks and shoes, the order is important. We do not seek the tools but the recursive manner in which Jesus interprets the Scriptures, not so that we can imitate his method but so that we can imitate Christ. That is, when Jesus quoted scripture, being the Incarnate Word, he was therefore citing himself, for the Father's purpose. So also when we exegete, we are citing ourselves, for Christ and His Kingdom. The text, the person, the purpose: three things that remain constant in every exegesis.

Our goal for this paper is to look at the three constants of this process, the attributes of this trinity and their interrelations, so that we can criticize ourselves as we engage in this most dangerous of divinely ordered activities. If we can, as it were, have the mind of Christ as he exegetes Scripture, then we have properly transformed our minds to the purposes of God (Rom 12). If there can be no escape from our liability in exegesis, at least we can choose the doctrines we want to die on.

We stated in the introduction that language was holy, because it is recursive. We refine that sloppy definition a bit to say that not all recursive things are holy, but all holy things are recursive. What makes language holy is not only its recursive nature, but its origin and its end. It was given Adam in the Garden (Gen 2:7), and is the primary

⁷Deut 23:2 where the 10th generation of an illegitimate son cannot serve as a priest in the temple.

distinguishing mark separating Gen 1 from Gen 2, separating the Garden from the Earth, separating Adam from the animals, while uniting Adam and Eve.⁸ Its purpose, its end, like everything else in the Garden, was for the glory of God, for the communion with God, for the recreation of the Trinity; being more than a created object but a created subject of the divine mystery. That is why language is holy.

But in saying that, we have not exhausted the holiness of Scripture, for it is holy in many more ways. All the Old Testament, like the Pentateuch itself, are the words given by God to his people for their salvation and sanctification. It was not just commandments of life, but instructions in holy living so that through this text God's people would find God himself. Nor should we suppose that this text exists in bodiless form in the mind of God as some timeless truth like the joyous music of the heavenly spheres, for even Heaven itself has received the text made flesh (John 1:14), the Divine Word who returned with captives in his train (Ps 68:18; Eph 4:8). For just as speech without breath is silent, words without speakers are dumb, and so these words of life depend upon the living for recitation in that mutual dependence whose purposor is God.

Therefore in order to understand this exegetical trinity of text, person, and purpose, it is necessary to consider more than the text in isolation, but the holy text in its context, the text with the speaker, and the speaker with God. In this first, foolish attempt to mine the mind of Christ, we confine ourselves to one quotation of Jesus: Mark 12:26-27, which will be our example, our Rosetta Stone of holy exegesis.

⁸There has been a lot of ink spilled on the *imago Dei*, which some have taken to be language, including C.S. Lewis. In another paper I argue it lies not in his anatomical and biological form, but in his mental/spiritual capability to talk. Thus the holiness of man began in the Garden and demands him to be in communication with God, while being the foundation of marriage.

Loop 1: The Purpose, the context

Wider Context

This pericope appears in all three synoptic gospels in the same place, between the Triumphal Entry and the Last Supper, in the last five days of his ministry. Over the objections of his disciples, Jesus has returned from Galilee, raised Lazarus from the dead, entered in Jerusalem grand style, and is directly confronting the Pharisees and Sadducees. From a human point of view, Jesus had never been more popular. Three years of ministry had overshadowed that of his relative John, had electrified the people, and had drawn the attention of the authorities. It seemed obvious that if an uprising were to begin it would have to begin in Jerusalem. If Jesus were to claim the rights of a king he would have to do it there. Just as every successful revolution makes a victorious triumph the centerpiece of its internal saga, so it would appear that this story is at the climax of ‘The Jesus Revolution’. Even in the non-synoptic gospel, John records the opposition Jesus encountered, making this moment the crucial conflict of his claim to the throne. So in a surprising show of unanimity, the Pharisees and the Herodians are looking for an opportunity to arrest him in a way that won’t lead to rioting.⁹

For Jesus is so immensely popular with the crowds, who see his presence in Jerusalem as the culmination of his ministry and believe that this confrontation will lead directly to his coronation, that they can’t arrest him publicly. Everything that he has done seems to confirm this trajectory: the king-like entrance into Jerusalem; the confrontational cleansing of the Temple; the challenge to priestly authority; and the veiled threat in the parable about the evil tenants. But at the same time he is teaching the crowds, it is the crowds that are providing him protection from arrest, and should he

stumble or lose popularity, his arrest would be imminent. He is riding the tiger of popular opinion, and must escalate the conflict for the sake of his life, much as Al Qaeda operated in Iraq throughout 2006-7.

Thus the authorities viewed Jesus as cashing in on his popularity, as making the move that would lead to another Maccabean revolt, that would bring down the retributive wrath of the Romans (as indeed occurred 40 years later). To prevent him from succeeding, they challenged Jesus to a rabbinical puzzle contest.¹⁰ The topic of taxes was chosen to either force his hand early (opposing the tax and getting arrested by the Romans), or diminish his popularity (supporting an unpopular tax). When this failed, the second strategy was to split the allegiance of his followers by having Jesus either defend a politically incorrect viewpoint (Resurrection) or a popularly incorrect viewpoint (materialism).¹¹ If enough of his followers could be peeled off, he would be vulnerable to arrest. This passage draws its importance not just from being at the center of the gospel story, but at the climax of his struggle with the religious authorities.¹² So at the pinnacle of his career, at the center of his cultural-political-religious heritage, at the peak of his physical prowess, Jesus was exegesing as his life depended on it.

Narrower Context

⁹J.A. Alexander “Commentary on the Gospel of Mark”, xxi, Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1956.

¹⁰Taylor, The Gospel according to St. Mark : the Greek text with introduction, notes, and indexes, 480, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.

¹¹Josephus, Ant. 18:12-17 says “the Sadducees hold that the soul perishes with the body”, quoted in John Donahue and Daniel Harrington “The Gospel of Mark”, Sacra Pagina Series vol 2, The Liturgical Press, 350,Collegeville, Minn. 2002, and compares them with the Epicureans. While Josephus is quite familiar with Hellenistic philosophy, he may be overly harsh with the rival Sadducees (Louis Feldman “Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus”, 515, Peabody: Henderson Pub, 2004.) who would have had difficulty harmonizing Epicurus with Moses.

¹²We note in passing that it is common in redaction criticism to excise passages that “fit rather awkwardly into the flow of the argument” as being later insertions. See Francis Muloney “The Gospel of Mark” 238-239, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002, footnotes 122 & 126. This is an example of a specific hermeneutic that circularly interprets Scripture, making use of the method of “subtraction.”

The quotation of Jesus occurs in the context of a debate with the Pharisees and Sadducees that was ostensibly about Mosaic Law, but intended to get Jesus in trouble with somebody and soon. Jesus parlayed the explosive question about taxes so effectively that the Pharisees went silent. This gave the Sadducees an opportunity to ask their stumper, which had the added benefit of shaming the more scholarly Pharisees, posing a riddle that was intended to show the inconsistency of the concept of the resurrection with Mosaic Law. Namely, a woman marries the oldest of 7 brothers, and when he dies, Moses commanded a brother to marry her to bear a son for the dead brother (Deut. 25:5ff). The unfortunate woman is childless, and the brothers prone to early death, so she ends up marrying all seven.¹³ So in the hypothetical Resurrection, the Sadducees want to know, who will be the woman's husband?

There are many unwritten rules in this debate, which are implicit in the text. In addition to disagreeing with the Pharisees on the Resurrection, the Sadducees also only accept the five books of Moses, so whatever Jesus answers has to come from the Pentateuch, he was not allowed, for example, to bring in the traditional rabbinic defense of Is 26:19; Ps 16:9-11; Job 19:26; Dan 12:1-2.¹⁴ Jesus deflects the force of their riddle by pointing out that there are alternative solutions to the stumper that still admit the Resurrection, the simplest is to point out that marriage is an earthly institution, so there can be no conflict in heaven, which he corroborates with the observation that the other heavenly beings, angels (Hebrew: sons of God) are not married either.

But Jesus is not content to leave the matter there; he has deflected the question but left the Sadducees still ensconced safely in their skepticism. Since the Sadducees also

¹³A parallel to Tobit 3:8, 15; 6:13; 7:11. See William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 427, Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Pub Co. 1974.

deny the existence of angels (Acts 23:8), his proof would have mainly satisfied the Pharisees and the crowds. So he turns the tables and says that their skepticism shows they are ignorant of both the Scriptures and the power of God.¹⁵ Perhaps it was understood at that time that their denial of the Resurrection arose from a denial of God's power to raise the dead. Certainly they thought they knew the Scriptures, this was one of the implicit rules of such a rabbinical puzzle debate. So if Jesus could prove the more difficult of the two assertions, their ignorance of Pentateuch, then the second would surely follow.

The logic seems associative, but recall that most of Jesus' audience already believed the truth of the Tanakh with its many resurrection stories. They already thought the Sadducees' rejection of the Tanakh was a willful ignorance that led them to deny the Resurrection. So Jesus' challenge was to prove, from the Pentateuch alone, that not only had God the power to raise the dead but that it applied generally to all men, and then he had won the second argument that it was their willful ignorance or unbelief that separated them from Heaven.¹⁶

¹⁴Craig Evans "Word Biblical Commentary Vol 34B" 255-256, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub 2001.

¹⁵William Lane "The Gospel According to Mark", p431 footnote 40 Argues that the traditional Pharisaical defense of the resurrection found in "TB *Sanhedrin* 90b where Rabbi Gamaliel II deduces it from Num. 11:9 ('in order that you may prolong your days on the land which God has promised to your fathers to give *to them*') on the ground that they must themselves be beneficiaries of the promise. In a similar manner Rabbi Johanan deduces it from Num 18:28 that Aaron must be alive all the time the law is in effect." Neither of these are in themselves compelling, since they require a more spectacular belief (resurrection) to be derived from a more minor legal belief (fairness involving additional beneficiaries to an earthly inheritance). If this was the best the Pharisees could muster, it is not surprising the Sadducees did not find it convincing. Lane then argues that Jesus increased the force of the argument by enlarging the beneficence to include anti-death. While we do not minimize Lane's insight, it remains a circular argument that we do not think the Sadducees would have found compelling.

¹⁶Some commentators think that his was an easy thing to do, all Jesus had to do was to appeal to the present tense of "I am the God of Abraham". But as Gould (Ezra P Gould, "The Gospel of Mark" The International Critical Commentary, 230, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1896.) comments "But this is a *non sequitur*, since it is a common expression in regard to both dead and living..."

This is a recurring theme for Jesus, that skepticism arises not from lack of knowledge, but from willful, and therefore sinful, unbelief. It is similar to the principle of jurisprudence that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Why? Because we have a legal responsibility to know the law (note the recursion!) In the same way, we have a moral responsibility to know the power of God, to know the Scriptures. Paul expands on this concept in Rom. 1:18-20, where he argues that God's power is plain to everyone, so that skepticism arises not from passive ignorance, but active suppression of the truth. This is not unique to Paul, but we can find this same sentiment in Job 28:28, Ps 111:10, Pr 1:7, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We cannot fear something we do not know, so the beginning of wisdom is an appropriate (= wise) response to what we cannot help but observe. This recursion on wisdom was a common theme of the prophets, making Jesus' declaration of ignorance not the condescension of a teacher, but the accusation of a prophet.

But the claims of a prophet are much greater than that of a teacher. A teacher recites the text and the opinions of others on the text, perhaps a famous teacher will add their gloss to the tradition, but a prophet grasps the authority of the text itself, he adds not gloss but text itself, he is text. For Jesus to "speak with authority" to the Sadducees, then, he must establish his prophetic credentials, but under their peculiar terms of using only the first five books of Moses. And since there was only one prophet in those books, Jesus must draw his authority from Moses himself. Therefore the manner of Jesus exegesis is as important as the content, for not only must he establish the truth of the Resurrection, but he must also establish his authority to appropriate that truth.

Finally we come to the matter of recursion itself. As our example from jurisprudence demonstrates, one must know the law in order to know that one must know it. Likewise, one must know God (and fear Him) in order to have the wisdom to seek to know God (through the Scriptures), which commands us to know Him. These are closed loops,¹⁷ and it would appear that just as foreigners and travellers are at a disadvantage with regard to local law, so also Gentiles and pagans have no opportunity to obtain wisdom, unless an outside influence were to introduce them to God or the Scriptures or both. Paul's claim is that there is just such an outside influence, and Ps 19:1-4 might be the Scripture Paul refers to in Rom 1:18ff. But Jesus has to make this argument without recourse to the Psalms. Why? Because the Sadducees have rejected them already. But on what basis have they rejected them? On the testimony of Moses? Or their desire to deny the Resurrection?

The Sadducees would no doubt claim their denial was the testimony of Moses, but because exegesis is a recursive task, the conclusion could very well have been the cause. They may have rejected the full Tanakh simply because they rejected the Resurrection. Pious and personal statements notwithstanding, we are not able to know our hearts sufficiently well to ever exclude a base motive.¹⁸ Bahnsen argues that the human mind suppresses the truth, not by making the Aristotelean antinomy of believing both A and not-A, but by invoking an intermediary statement B, such that B implies not-A, with as many intermediaries as needed to reduce the cognitive dissonance.¹⁹ The Sadducees may

¹⁷Douglas Hofstadter, "Goedel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid", 15, New York:Vintage Books, 1979.

¹⁸ Canon Michael Green argues that Sadducees did not want a Resurrection because they had already obtained power. Quoted in a sermon from internet:
<http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=9133> accessed on 10/5/08.)

¹⁹Gregory Lyle Bahsen, "A conditional resolution of the apparent paradox of self-deception" 1979, PhD USC.

have employed this process in adducing that they believed Moses, but not the Resurrection.

If the circularity of exegesis depends on our choice of starting point, how then can we ever obtain certainty? As we will see later, certainty lies outside the method, and to a large extent, is a divine Trinitarian revelation beyond our limited intellect. However, we can obtain *uncertainty*, we can tell whether our hermeneutic is flawed by whether the conclusions and premises are balanced. That is, our exegesis must survive irrespective of what motives we assign to it. For in a circular argument, in a recursive hermeneutic, both the premises and the conclusions must be separately justified, they must be able to stand in any order if they are to stand at all. This is an important point so let me say it again. Since a recursive hermeneutic brings us right back to where we started from, for it to be valid, it must not matter where in the argument we begin, whether with the premises or with the conclusions.

Let us apply this principle to the Sadducees argument. (a) If there is no Resurrection, then only the first 5 books of Moses are true. (b) If only the first 5 books of Moses are true, there is no Resurrection. Note that these are non-equivalent statements, (a) $A \rightarrow B$ is not the same as (b) $B \rightarrow A$, but they must both be true if the Sadducees circular claim is to be upheld against the criticism that they have a biased, recursive hermeneutic. Jesus' statement that they know not the power of God attacks the first and hidden claim, while his statement that they know not the Scriptures attacks the second and public claim.

But for his logic to succeed in convincing (or silencing) the Sadducees, Jesus has to submit himself to their hermeneutic, he has to humble himself to ignore the rest of Scripture, he has to make his argument from within their hermeneutical system. It is a

very VanTillian approach²⁰ that Jesus must take here, and so his exegesis takes on a great deal more significance, because it establishes some general principles of apologetic hermeneutics, that, for example, Paul widely uses (Acts 13:15ff,17:22ff).

We note in passing that Jesus employs the rhetorical device of “chiasmus” in his reply to the Sadducees, opening with a general condemnation of their hermeneutical approach, moving to the specific problems, and then ending with a general approbation.²¹ While not important to the logic, it nonetheless demonstrates an awareness of how his words were being received, and care to arrange them for maximum rhetorical effect. We also note that many commentators see Jesus applying a 19th century apologetic, crushing the Sadducees by force of logic.²² Their praise for Jesus’ intellect notwithstanding, we are unimpressed by their circular logic, which presupposes the truth of the Resurrection to argue for it, and do not think that either the Pharisees or the Sadducees would have been convinced with the argument as presented by these commentators. We will have to probe deeper than Enlightenment rationality to find the silencing force of his argument.

But there is a further sense of urgency about his hermeneutic that we learn from the wider context of his debate. For if he fails to convince the crowds and they disperse, the Herodians and Pharisees will arrest him on the spot. So Jesus not only has to present a hermeneutic that rigorously defeats the logic of the Sadducees and that works from within their restricted system, but also one that is acceptable to the public. This means it

²⁰Cornelius Van Til “Apologetics” 62, Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub Co, 1976.

²¹David Garland “The NIV Application Commentary” Grand Rapids:Zondervan 470, 1996.

²² E.g., ‘In this place God reveals Himself as standing in a real relation to men who were long dead. But the living God cannot be in relation with any who have ceased to exist; therefore the patriarchs were still living in His sight at the time of the Exodus; dead to the visible world, they were alive unto God.’ Henry Barclay Swete, “The Gospel According to St Mark”, 265, New York:McMillan and Co, 1898, or Moloney, “The Gospel of Mark”, 239.

has to follow certain widely known rabbinical conventions for the handling of Scripture and especially, Moses.

Mk 12:26-27 (ESV)

And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.

Notice how Jesus is quite specific about his quotation, not only identifying it as in the Pentateuch, but also narrowing it down to the Ex 3 narrative where Moses meets God at the burning bush. Considering how many gospel quotations are indirectly referenced, it is significant that Jesus gives four sequential identifiers, verbal quotation marks, for this passage: “book of Moses”, “passage about the bush”, “God spoke”, “saying”. Jesus is making sure that the Sadducees cannot escape the force of his exegesis in an appeal to uninspired speech or paraphrase. He increases its force by attributing the quote directly to God, so that even Moses’ intermediary function in transcribing Scripture is removed from the debate.²³ This is the point of Jesus’ quadruple reference: to remove all “Protestant” wiggle room that would attribute unwanted sentiment to uninspired gloss.

Jesus begins with the most holy event in the Pentateuch, the calling and ordination of Moses as priest and prophet Ex 3, who will transmit the sacred words of God to the people, words which include this event. In this self-referential sanctification of the Pentateuch, and without which the Pentateuch would be merely another narrative, Jesus zeroes in on the first (Ex 3:6) or possibly third and fourth self-definition of God (Ex. 3:15,16). The second self-definition (Ex 3:14) is the more profound and recursive even in

²³Philo considers whether Moses was speaking on his own or for God, but in cases of direct quote, attributes it entirely to God, Yehoshua Amir, “Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the writings of Philo”, 438, in Mikra ed. Martin Jan Mulder, Peabody:Hendrickson Pub, 2004.

language, but was given in response to Moses' doubt, rather than a declaration meant for the people. So the definition Jesus used was meant for mass consumption, to distinguish God from all other foreign gods by reference to widely known history. This public self-definition was reinforced with the command (3:15) "This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." In other words, Jesus is referencing a definition of God that is the *sine qua non* of Judaism.

Why would we assume that Jesus was pinning the Sadducees down, why would we assume that they desired more flexibility than Jesus was allowing? This goes back to Bahnsen, who said that when we have a cognitive dissonance²⁴, a problem reconciling faith and action (or observation), we insert intermediate steps between the dissonant pair until the logical distance has sufficiently reduced the mental tension to tolerable levels. So the Sadducees had a cognitive dissonance between their subservience to the Romans and their desire for a Jewish theocracy, which they resolved by subtraction, the removal of offending doctrines or prophecies from the canon. This is not the only solution, for the Gnostics solved it by addition, adding to and so diluting the offending prophecies to remove their force, nevertheless subtraction appears to be the millennial method of choice for those who live close to the political establishment and its never-ending compromise.²⁵

Now an ethical or moral cognitive dissonance comes under the broad definition of guilt. And the management of guilt has been the bread and butter of religion through

²⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_Dissonance (accessed October 3, 2008.)

²⁵Compare with Marcion's heresy (Robert Bradshaw 1998, http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article_marcion.html, accessed 24 Sept. 2008) and German liberalism, which removed much of the scriptures from the canon. Nearly all instances of subtraction appear to be attempts to make the Scriptures more (not less) compatible with the culture.

countless centuries, making the solution by addition or subtraction so commonplace that we have all kinds of names and categories of sin corresponding to the various implementations. Moses himself issues a death sentence, Deut 13, for any prophet, relative, or city council that espouses service (or worship) of some new thing (or idol). Addition was strictly forbidden. Likewise Moses' gives several chapters of curses, Deut 27-28 if they forget even the smallest of the commandments of the Law. This ban on addition and subtraction is summarized at the conclusion of the ceremony on Mt Gerizim with the verse, Deut 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Law." (NASB)

The Sadducees knew all these commands, and yet they still managed to subtract from Scripture to reduce their guilt by applying their restrictive (and circular) hermeneutic. This is no little thing, for it is a small step from eliminating 80% of the Scriptures to eliminating another 80% of the Pentateuch because it didn't quote God directly, or didn't contain a command, or contradicted some other supposed truth of Scripture. That is, it is a small step from limiting our Scripture by logic to making logic our Scripture. If our logic enables us to cut-and-paste with holy things (recursion!), then our logic has become holy. And when the self devours the holy, it is itself wholly devouring. In this self-consuming fire, we may become like Rudolf Bultmann, shipwrecked with only 12 words of Scripture,²⁶ a fragment burnt at both ends, so that Jesus had to act fast. He had to seize what little the Sadducees still had of Scripture to

²⁶Bultmann was said to have thought that only Mk 12:17 was a direct quote of Jesus. While the Jesus Seminar followers who succeeded him do not think any of the sayings of Jesus are direct quotes, they do think that 18% of them are authentic. (Lane McGaughy http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/sayings.html accessed on 24 Sept 2008)

rescue them from the flames.

After quoting Moses quoting God, Jesus then gives the interpretation. While he doesn't quote scripture in his interpretation, he makes use of a common phrase in the Bible, but found only once in the Pentateuch, right after the 2nd giving of the Decalogue, Deut 5:26, a definition of God that separates Him from the idols of the nations round about: "the living God". It is a participial phrase found 14 more times in the MT, [Jos 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Ki 19:4,16; Ps 42:2, 84:2; Is 37:4,17 Jer 10:10, 23:36; Dan 6:20, 26; Hos 1:10]. In all these cases, the participle is attributive, modifying God, distinguishing this God from all the idols of the nations around; a "living God," which the prophets tell us, [Is 40:18-20, 46:1-7], is distinct from idols that neither move, nor breathe, nor save.

There are additional verses where there is a strong association between "God" and "living" but this common participle is not used as an attributive to God [1 Sam 25:29; Ps 52:5, 56:13; Is 8:19; Ez 32:32]. These are worth considering since they reflect on the way Jesus exegeted the word. (NASB)

1 Sam 25:29--Abigail tells David that his life will be "bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God". That is, as God lives, so shall David. Ps 52:5--David condemns the wicked, for "God will break you down...and uproot you from the land of the living". A living God will kill the wicked, where "land of the living" is the place of life. Ps 56:13--David will "walk before God in the light of the living" so both God and David are alive. Is 8:19--Isaiah reprimands the Israelites who consult spiritists (KJV) "should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead?" The Hebrew is

highly elliptical but there may be a sense in which God is the one referred to as “living”. Ez 32:32--is much like Ps 52:5.

So we can see that “living God” has both the meaning of not-idol God, but also the meaning of life, action, or breath in contrast to dead. By the rules of the Sadducee riddle game, Jesus cannot appeal to these extra-Mosaic books, he has only the Deut 5:26 passage to work from. Nevertheless, the resonance with the other 15 passages gave public credence to his exegesis that a common attribution of God includes the sense “alive”.

It is even more appropriate when we consider the Hellenistic culture in which Jesus and his audience lived, for in Greek mythology, Hades was the god of the dead. So just as God directed the “land of the living”, it would have been understood that Hades directed the “land of the dead.” Jesus statement would then have the connotation “He is not Hades but Yahweh.” This was not a convoluted argument, but straight and simple and easily grasped. As if to hammer that home, Jesus gives no more explication of this argument, which one would expect if it were new or complicated or subtle, and merely concludes “you are quite wrong.” The implication is that even a child can grasp the fallacy in their logic, and that they are morally responsible for their ignorance.²⁷

So we see that Jesus has managed to avoid losing his public appeal, he has crushed their skepticism, he has not retreated or shown any weakness, and he has avoided all the traps they set for him. But why were his enemies silenced? Why did such disparate groups as the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees and the Jerusalem crowds all seemingly accept the validity of his argument? What was the apologetic force?

²⁷ *πλανᾶσθε*. carries a moral sense from LXX Deut 4:19 onwards through the NT use. Henry Barclay Swete, “The Gospel According to St Mark” New York: Macmillan company 266, 1898.

Which is to say, Jesus' logic appears specious. Just because He is the God-who-is-alive and calls Himself the God-of-your-fathers does not imply He is the God-of-your-fathers-who-are-alive. Even in English we had to change the verb from "is-alive" to "are-alive" to arrive at the meaning Jesus' found. And the grammar is even more confining in Greek and Hebrew than in English, because the participial endings have to agree in gender and number with the noun. So what does the grammar tell us?

We said earlier that hermeneutics was circular, recursive, and likewise our study has made one loop through the passage, addressing the purposes of the encounter, the background of his historical ministry. Now we take a second loop through the passage, looking at how the words Jesus used explain the text. One should not be deceived into thinking that grammar is merely a set of rules that can open the text as a hydraulic press opens nuts, for the grammar is itself derived from the text. Likewise the inspection of first century rules of exegesis may reveal how Jesus silenced the Pharisees, but should bring us back to how the Pharisees adopted the rules in the first place.

Loop 2: The Text

In our first survey of the pericope, we noted how Jesus constructed a novel exegesis of Deuteronomy to silence the Sadducees, but we did not grasp the force of his central argument, the linchpin of his logic. Commentators have produced an enormous number of theories for why this argument held water, but their justifications seem like sieves falling into three groups: those that use the fact of the Resurrection to argue that the logic for this resurrection must be valid; those that argue for some peculiarity of the Greek grammar that removes the logic²⁸; and those that say it was an invalid argument.²⁹ We

²⁸Robert H. Gundry "Mark: A Commentary on his apology for the cross" 702-3, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co 1993.

have noted that the first group is using circular logic, the second group has mostly been contradicted by other grammarians, leaving the third group of somewhat dismissive theologians. Typical of this third group is Gundry,

Modern exegetes would brand the transfer of Exod. 3:6 from past to future as highhanded violation of the originally intended meaning. But in first century Palestinian Judaism, as remarked before, an argument's consisting of grammatical historical exegesis would have lacked cogency, just as in another two thousand years different techniques of interpretation (psychological, sociological, economic, rhetorical, and structural posing possibilities that grow out of the present, to say nothing of unpredictable possibilities) may cause grammatical historical exegesis to lose its cogency. What counted then was ingenuity at playing with words by such means as transferring them to new frames of reference where they could be made to say new things, as indeed at the popular level may still count for more than does grammatical historical exegesis.³⁰

Is Gundry right? Is Jesus pulling new meanings out of a hat? Is our difficulty understanding Jesus' logic, and the potency of his exegesis merely our cultural conditioning to western modes of thought? Before we escape with that bromide, we might examine Jesus' use of the OT, whether he was quoting the Greek LXX, the Hebrew pre-MT, or the Aramaic Targumim, all of which were in use in the synagogue at the time of Jesus' ministry. Of course, if Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and we have the NT in Greek, we can only speculate on the precise wording of Jesus' quote, but certainly the NT church would have known the LXX comparison.

Mark 12: 26 περὶ δὲ τῶν νεκρῶν ὅτι ἐγείρονται οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ
μωϊσέως ἐπὶ τοῦ βάρτου πῶς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς λέγων, ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς ἀβραὰμ καὶ [ὁ]
θεὸς ἰσαὰκ καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς ἰακώβ; 27 οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων· πολὺ
πλανᾶσθε.

²⁹Gundry "Mark: A Commentary on his apology for the cross" 704-9.

LXX Deut 3:6 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς σου θεὸς Ἀβρααμ
καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαακ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακωβ ἀπέστρεψεν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ
εὐλαβεῖτο γὰρ κατεμβλέψαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ

LXX Deut 5:26 τίς γὰρ σὰρξ ἥτις ἤκουσεν φωνὴν θεοῦ **ζῶντος** λαλοῦντος ἐκ
μέσου τοῦ πυρὸς ὡς ἡμεῖς καὶ ζήσεται

In Mark 12:26 we see Jesus eliding the phrase “am the God of your fathers” from LXX Deut 3:6, compressing the quote to “I (am) the God Abraam and the God Isaac and the God Jacob” but otherwise identical with LXX. Considering how few NT quotations literally quote the LXX, this is a remarkably faithful rendition. The next verse, however, has a substantial change, a switch in participial number between Mk 12:27 and Deut 5:26. Jesus’ construction is “God of the living (ones),” θεὸς ... ζῶντων, whereas in LXX we read “the voice of God of the living (one),” φωνὴν θεοῦ ζῶντος. Jesus has transformed the participle from the singular to the plural, from referring to God to referring to the patriarchs. Likewise the parallel passages in the LXX [Josh 3:10; 1Ki 17:26,36; 4Ki 19:4,16; Ps 41:3; 83:3; Is 37:4,17; Jeremiah absent; Dan 6:20,26 (2nd version); Hos 2:1] always use the singular when modifying God. This is not surprising, since it was customary for LXX translators to have apologetic concerns in mind as they translated, careful to avoid the rampant Greek polytheism,³¹ so the participle would agree in gender and number with the masculine singular θεός. Of course, Jesus isn’t claiming to be quoting Deuteronomy directly, but θεός ζῶντων would have been jarring for those

³⁰ Gundry, “Mark” 704.

³¹ Emanuel Tov, “The Septuagint” 172 in Mikra, ed. Martin Jan Mulder, Peabody: Hendrickson Pub, 2004.

accustomed to the usual descriptive phrase in the singular.³²

What of the less attributive uses mentioned earlier? Only [LXX Ps 51:7; 55:14; Is 8:19] use the plural, and in all cases, to refer to undead people rather than God. When the text is ambiguous, referring to both God and a person [1Sam 25:29], then the participle is singular. The highly elliptic clause in Is 8:19 remains elliptic in the LXX, τί ἐκζητοῦσιν περὶ τῶν ζώντων τοὺς νεκρούς, which may, as with all things poetic, permit some liberties with the elided subject to include God, though it would appear a stretch. Nevertheless, this becomes the sole LXX support for Jesus' use of the plural to include God, which hardly seems a justification, especially with the Sadducees. Of course, the original audience was undoubtedly more familiar with the Targums and the predecessor of the Masoretic text than the LXX, so we turn next to the Hebrew MT.

Hebrew MT: Deut 5:26 אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים 'ēlōhîm chayyîm

We immediately note that the MT has used the plural for God “elohim” which takes the plural participle “chayyim”. So Jesus' use of the plural (or Mark's translation into Greek) is (in)appropriately literal. This is not a smooth translation since the strong Mosaic emphasis on “one God” has caused all LXX translators to ignore the plural. Surveying the other 14 Tanakh references, where we give the number of God followed by the number of the participle, we find the 1Samuel and Jeremiah passages to be plural-plural, the Hezekiah story told in 2Kings and Isaiah to be plural-singular, and the Joshua, Psalms, Daniel and Hosea passages all singular-singular. Ignoring the Jeremiah passages, it is tempting to view this as a temporal progression, an evolution from the unclear and

³²I had a similar shock in a church service when “her” was substituted for “him” in the liturgy concerning God. The very familiarity of the phrase makes the substitution more shocking.

perhaps polytheism-contaminated terminology of the Pentateuch, to the grammatically mixed terminology of the Hezekiah revival, to the pure monotheism of the exilic period. Which is to say, the LXX and Targumim would then represent the logical conclusion, the final purified form of Jewish religion that was found in the Pentateuch in impure form. Even if the Pharisees and the Sadducees (not to mention Josephus and Philo) would object that the Pentateuch was never contaminated, surely they would not object to our tempting conclusion about refined theology.

But they would be wrong. For in this case, Jesus makes use of that same grammatical peculiarity of the MT to make his point, namely, the plural participle applies not just to the plural God, but to the witnesses, to the patriarchs as well. It almost seems an accident of the Pentateuch, since a generation later in the book of Joshua the singular is used for this same construction. Did it perhaps indicate a rabbinic tradition? If so, it would have shown up in the Aramaic translation that was undoubtedly read in the synagogues in Jesus' day to which we turn next.

Aramaic Targum: Several Aramaic translations of the Torah exist, the most authoritative being the Babylonian Targum Onkelos. Despite being a "word-for-word" translation, there are nevertheless 1601 deviations from the MT, of which 426 were intended to preserve the "honor of God", and 10 of those are conversions of the plural "Elohim" to the singular tetragrammaton.³³ Like the LXX then, Deut 5:26 is rendered using the singular rather than the plural, and accordingly, the participle "living" is now "dyy," masculine singular. Curiously, Targum Pseudo-Jonathon and Neofiti keep the plural in their translation of this verse, despite holding closely to the Targum Onkelos in

³³ Israel Drazin, "Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy", 19-20, New York: Ktav Pub 1982.

other areas.³⁴ Could this be evidence that the Palestinian Targumim were affected by Jesus' teaching?

So we see that Jesus' turns a small grammatical peculiarity of the Hebrew into a major exegetical point. And not only are the learned Pharisees and Sadducees impressed, but so are the crowds. As we mentioned before, the lack of any extended commentary after this *tour de force* suggests that such exegesis was valid, obvious, accepted, and perhaps imitated. Since Josephus tells us that even the Sadducees had to bend to Pharisaical exegesis, we should look in the rabbinical literature for an explanation of the ground rules Jesus was using.

Rabbinical Lit

Hillel gave 7 principles for rabbinic exegesis, or middot, in the 1st century BC Tosefta, later expanded to 13 middot in the Sifra.³⁵ Given the BC precedence of Hillel's list, this would undoubtedly have been the comparison used to criticize Jesus' hermeneutic: 1. An inference from minor to major (or vice versa); 2. An inference from analogy of expressions; 3. Induction from multiple cases in same scripture; 4. Induction from two separate scriptures sharing a common feature; 5. General principle and enumeration or vice versa; 6. Adducing corollaries by comparison with similar law; 7. Necessary implications drawn out from the passage.

Evans defends Jesus' exegesis from the claim that he violated all 7 principles, arguing that Jesus was probably using the third principle ("Building a principle from one passage of Scripture") and goes on to give several examples from the rabbinic tradition

³⁴ Drazin, "Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy", 104.

³⁵ Rimon Kasher "The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature" 585, in Mikra, Peabody: Hendrickson Pub Inc. 2004.

post-Resurrection.³⁶ These later examples are interesting, but probably attest to the power of Mark's gospel to affect Rabbinic thought rather than the converse. In any case, the force of Jesus' argument could not have depended on later thought. Nor would it have been as effective in silencing the Sadducees if it had already been proposed and argued. The sheer abruptness of the delivery, and the speechlessness of the Sadducees indicate that it was both compelling and novel.

It would appear to me that combining the Deut. 5:26 with Ex. 3:6 is using aspects of all the middot. 1) Jesus says God is not just favoring the patriarchs with life (minor), but all of us (major). 2) Jesus is drawing an analogy concerning the attributions of God, from "Abraam" to "living." 3) Multiple verses are valid for the Pharisees, because of the Jeremiah and 1 Samuel passages, though perhaps not for the Sadducees. 4) Common terms are the most obvious, God being the constant in both places. 5) Since Ex 3:6 is an enumeration of the patriarchs, we can generalize to all. 6) Corollaries might be derived from the command of Ex. 3:15 "this is my name and thus I am to be remembered." 7) It would follow from the necessary extension of life to the men whom God uses in his self-definition. In other words, Jesus didn't stretch rabbinic exegesis, he used nearly every principle, making not just a compelling conclusion but prophetic condemnation.

Such was the force of his delivery, we see a complete psychological change come over his audience, and a rich young ruler pours out the burning question of his heart concerning Torah, asking what commandment is the paradigm, the exemplar, the explanation controlling all other halakhah. For Jesus was doing much more than impressing Rabbis with his method, even more than prophetically condemning the

³⁶ Evans, "Word Bible Commentary Vol 34b", 257.

subtractive Sadducees, Jesus was proclaiming himself the Messiah³⁷, the expert in the law, heir to the throne of David, and herald of the Kingdom of God. His hermeneutic was about his authority to interpret Torah, and the Torah was about him.

This brings us to the last loop around this passage, what does Jesus' exegesis tell us about hermeneutics? What does it tell us about himself? What does it tell us about us?

Loop 3: The Person

We begin this section by describing where we stand in the continuum of hermeneutics. A Reformed perspective was enunciated by Berkhof in 1950:

In this study on Hermeneutics, we deem it necessary to include ... (1) A brief outline of the history... (2) A description of ... the principles that are to be applied in its interpretation, (3) An indication of the ... requirements that are essential in an interpreter of the Bible. (4) A discussion of the threefold interpretation of the Bible, namely, (a) *the Grammatical*, including the logical interpretation; (b) *the Historical*, including also the psychological interpretation; and (c) *the Theological* interpretation.³⁸

Berkhof then traces the history of interpreting scripture, commenting on those that were helpful and unhelpful. He had little good to say about allegorical or Alexandrian approaches but approved of grammatical-historical or Antiochian approaches.

Characteristic was this note:

J. A. Turretin opposed the arbitrary procedure of Coccejus and his followers. Averse to the imaginary senses discovered by this school, he *insisted on it that the Bible should be interpreted without any dogmatic prepossessions, and with the aid of logic and analysis*. He exercised a profound and beneficial influence.³⁹

That is to say, he emphasizes logic and downplays the third point of his threefold approach, limiting the Theological interpretation to be support for predetermined

³⁷ "The messiah is a God fearing, pious Jew, who is both a great Torah scholar and a great leader as well. He is a direct descendent of King David, and will be anointed as the new Jewish King." Quoted on AISH http://www.aish.com/literacy/concepts/The_Messiah.asp accessed on Oct 2, 2008.

³⁸ Berkhof, Principles, 13.

doctrines, including as minor contributors with special methods: typology, prophecy, and psalms. Regarding the NT use of OT scriptures, he argues that they do not teach us a rule, but are to be taken as mere illustrations rather than as lessons in method.

Where then does Berkhof get his rules? Clearly not from Scripture itself, but either from the traditions of the Antiochian school, or from the learning and rationalism of the Enlightenment. Inasmuch as Berkhof clings to the orthodoxy of tradition, his Theological Method remains sound, but by not letting his Hermeneutics interact with his theology, by not allowing his logic to be derived from theology, he denies any benefit from the method to the Method. As a consequence, his tools must dull and rust with age, incapable of being renewed with the new discoveries and philosophies of the times. Taking this as warning, and remembering Van Til's comment that all reasoning is circular, how then can we learn from Jesus' example?

The first thing we notice is how Jesus ignored all the translations. He even ignored the majority testimony of the MT, restricting himself to the minority testimony of Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel and Jeremiah. Of course, the Sadducee rules required he use the single referent in Deuteronomy, but he showed no hesitation using the minority variant with the plural participle. Clearly he trusted the MT implicitly, and the Torah explicitly. Why?

Jesus, like the Rabbis, believed that every syllable, every waw of the Ur-MT was inspired by God, and was there for a reason. Therefore variants are not errors creeping into the text, but markers that God had a special meaning attached to them. This goes beyond the grammatical-historical method, which assumes that the truth of a passage lies in the meaning of the original speaker, or the understanding of the first audience. Rather,

³⁹ Berkhof, "Principles" 30.

Jesus and the Rabbis held that the meaning lies in the text itself, which comes from the mind of God. While we Reformed today might say original languages are important, no church will disqualify a candidate if he only reads from an English translation, for we believe that a translation captures all that is necessary for salvation. Yet this view is a remarkable recent understanding.

All the great religions of the East—Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Islam—insist that one learn the original language to study Scripture. Just as the Rabbis did not permit the Targum to be read from, lest it gain credibility on a level with Torah, so also Islam has no authorized translation of the Quran. With regard to the Greek text of the NT, the great schism of East from West was precipitated by the unauthorized insertion of the *filioque* clause into the Latin version of the Nicene Creed. Vladimir Lossky, an Orthodox theologian and apologist to the Catholics, writes,

By the dogma of the *Filioque*, the God of the philosophers and savants is introduced into the heart of the Living God, taking the place of the *Deus absconditus, qui posuit tenebras latibulum suum*. The unknowable essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit receives positive qualifications....When we speak of the Trinity in itself, we are confessing, in our poor and always defective human language, the mode of existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...⁴⁰

So Lossky blames the Latin church of eisegesis, reading back into theology foreign philosophy, which was imported surreptitiously by the words. The heresy, Lossky implies, comes from a Latin church unfamiliar with the nuanced Greek of the church fathers. Generalizing from these examples, we might paraphrase Lossky that the epistemological error of the West is to found the Truth in the meaning, rather than in the text itself, an error arising from the Latin church's use of the Bible in translation. To

⁴⁰Vladimir Lossky "The Image and Likeness of God" 88-89, Crestwood: St Vladimirs Sem Press, 1974.

avoid this error, the Rabbis required the Targum to be recited, not read from a book alongside the Torah, lest it acquire the prestige of the Torah.

In the introduction we said that those things that reference themselves are holy, and that God, Man and language are a holy trinity, they have the characteristics of persons. Just as we cannot own God anymore than we own our friends, we cannot own the Word or the Truth. Rather we cherish it, dialogue with it, befriend it. We respect it, admire it, and imitate it. This is the way the Rabbis viewed Torah. This explains the geniza, the kissing of the scrolls, the unnatural veneration for the Bible evident even among Protestants of an earlier generation. This explains why the best interpreter of the Word is the Word, just as the best explanation for a spouse's behavior is the spouse.

If we do not believe that reasoning is circular, if we do not believe that the Word is holy, we have adopted the static hermeneutic of the Sadducees, the sanctified rationality that destroys personality. Certainly the German heirs of the Enlightenment were guilty of such linear logic and like the Sadducees were themselves convicted by Christ. Because the truth is not found in logic or in propositions, the Truth is a person. For even before the Word became flesh, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

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