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The Use of the Old Testament  
in the New Testament



## NEW APPROACHES TO THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The study of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament (OT/NT) is now a subdiscipline in its own right, with burgeoning sub-specialties focused on important questions that arise from each stage of an author's reference to an OT text. The field touches on the full scope of methodologies used in biblical studies—historical-critical, literary and hermeneutical, theological, and practical.<sup>1</sup> We may look back with fondness on the relative methodological simplicity of earlier influential works by C. H. Dodd, Barnabas Lindars, Richard Longenecker, Donald Juel, and others.<sup>2</sup> The field has now come of age methodologically, full of vigor and excitement at the fulsome possibilities, though it has not yet reached the wisdom of advanced years capable of producing holistic evaluation from experience and hindsight.

Since many others have undertaken to provide orderly accounts of the things accomplished in the field,<sup>3</sup> it seems best to me to provide a more

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<sup>1</sup>Leroy Huizenga, "The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory," *JSNT* 38, no. 1 (2015): 17.

<sup>2</sup>C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1953); Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London: SCM, 1961); Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). As Huizenga, "Old Testament in the New," 18, puts it, "One sees a certain broadening from a narrower emphasis on overt quotation which seemed to give traditional philologists and historical critics such prominent points of purchase for the reconstruction of *Sitz im Leben*, to allusions and the rhetorical functions involved in their perception, and to biblical texts as part of the general system of literature and culture." One might point to the publication of Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), as marking the "methodological turn" in the field.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Dale C. Allison "The Old Testament in the New Testament," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to 600*, eds. James Carleton Paget and Joachim Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 479–502; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in*

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modestly selective, narrower presentation of some horizon-expanding research, especially work that asks new questions or offers methodologically innovative answers to old questions.<sup>4</sup>

This means that I will not be directly addressing a perennial set of questions for the OT/NT concerning the hermeneutical approaches of the NT authors.<sup>5</sup> Many of these questions stem from an evangelical interest in the unity of the two Christian testaments and creating a unified biblical theology.<sup>6</sup> Such questions continue to be discussed in the field, and the possible answers continue to be refined against the evidence both in smaller studies and in massive undertakings, such as the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.<sup>7</sup> Greg Beale has attempted to develop a manageable methodology from such a perspective for interpreting individual instances of the OT/NT.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in what follows, I will address recent research on prosopological exegesis, relevance theory, ancient media culture, and social memory theory.

*the New: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2015); the dedicated volume of *JSNT* 38, no. 1 (2015); B. J. Oropeza and Steve Moyise, eds., *Exploring Intertextuality: Diverse Strategies for New Testament Interpretation of Texts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016); Matthew W. Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," in *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, eds. Scot McKnight and Nijay K. Gupta (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 83–102; David Allen and Steve Smith, eds., *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Although some might present such an article with an air of objectivity and comprehensiveness, without pretense I own the fact that I have selected the research presented here solely because I have found it stimulating and helpful.

<sup>5</sup>Do they follow the most basic modern rule for interpreting texts—that texts should be interpreted according to their literary and historical context? How do NT interpretations compare to those of Jewish contemporaries? Do they read the OT typologically, allegorically, through a promise/fulfillment grid, or in some other way? See the articles collected in G. K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). For evangelicals this quickly becomes a question of whether modern interpreters should imitate the methods of the NT authors, for which see Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 214–20; and chs. 21 and 22 by Longenecker and Beale in *Right Doctrine*. Arthur Keefer, "The Meaning and Place of Old Testament Context in OT/NT Methodology," in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, eds. David Allen and Steve Smith (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 73–85, shows that many scholars working in this field use "context" in an insufficiently defined way or mean vastly different things than others.

<sup>6</sup>To bracket out such questions and approaches in this article should not be understood as denigrating them. I have great interest in these areas, and I trust that the other articles in this journal issue will address the field primarily from these perspectives.

<sup>7</sup>G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis And Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012). The methodology laid out by Beale is the ostensible methodology prescribed for authors of the commentary in the previous footnote.

## I. PROSOPOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

Recent research on prosopological exegesis marks a fitting place to begin since it touches on perennial questions of the NT authors' exegetical techniques and hermeneutical interests, yet it does so from an expansive methodological perspective. Matthew Bates has proposed that the NT interpretation of OT passages must be understood not only with regard to the LXX source text and contemporary Jewish interpretation, but also in the context of contemporary and subsequent Christian writings that either interpret the same OT passage or comment on the NT passage incorporating the OT reference.<sup>9</sup> He believes that this "fuller diachronic intertextuality" will give us a better picture of the NT authors' exegetical methods.<sup>10</sup> One of the outcomes of such an approach is the possibility that NT authors may have been employing prosopological exegesis. This exegetical technique seeks to identify the specific speaker or addressee in ambiguous OT passages with God, the Holy Spirit, Christ, the church, or the apostles, among others. It is assumed that the Holy Spirit caused the OT authors to speak in the voice of another person (*prosōpon*). While some patristic interpreters explicitly state this as their method, Bates proposes that prosopological readings underlie several interpretations of the OT in the NT as well.

Building on the work of Carl Andresen's influential study of prosopological exegesis in patristics, Bates defines the method as "a reading technique whereby an interpreter seeks to overcome a real or perceived ambiguity regarding the identity of the speakers or addressees (or both) in the divinely inspired source text by assigning nontrivial prosopa (i.e., nontrivial vis-à-vis the 'plain sense' of the text) to the speakers or addressees (or both) in order to make sense of the text."<sup>11</sup> Similar techniques were employed by Hellenistic authors in interpreting classical texts and by some

<sup>9</sup>Matthew W. Bates, "Beyond Hays' *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul: A Proposed Diachronic Intertextuality with Romans 10:16 as a Test Case*," in *Paul and Scripture: Extending the Conversation*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 263–74.

<sup>10</sup>Dennis Stamps, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as a Rhetorical Device: A Methodological Proposal," in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 24, expresses a similar thought: "While one needs to be careful not to read back into the NT developments documented in the post-NT writings like the early church fathers, nonetheless these early writings provide further evidence of the developing perspective and practice of early Christian communities, which may shed light on the use of the OT in the NT."

<sup>11</sup>Matthew W. Bates, *The Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco: Baylor, 2012), 218.

Jewish authors in interpreting the OT.<sup>12</sup>

Bates identifies several criteria which the OT text and the NT text must meet in order to be considered an instance of prosopological exegesis.<sup>13</sup> Madison Pierce has clarified these criteria, proposing that the base text must (1) include speech, (2) lack specificity in speaker or addressee, and (3) hold authoritative status for the interpretive community. The interpreting text must (1) identify the ambiguous speaker or addressee, and (2) may have an introductory formula using the term *prosōpon* (person). In addition, (3) presence of a prosopological exegesis of the base text in other texts makes its presence in the interpreting text more likely. Pierce notes that identification of an ambiguous speaker or addressee is the only essential feature of prosopological exegesis.<sup>14</sup> Bates has argued for the presence of prosopological exegesis in a variety of NT texts and attempted to demonstrate that the NT use of this technique provides a starting point for further Trinitarian developments of the following centuries.<sup>15</sup> Pierce has focused her attention on the passages in Hebrews where God, Jesus, and the Spirit are said to speak to one another and to the church, in addition to examining the way this divine discourse contributes to the author's characterization of God and the letter's overall argument.

Psalms 110 is a fitting example of how a NT author might interpret prosopologically, not only because it fits the base text criteria above, but also because it appears in two different contexts where the addressee of the speech in 110:1 is explicitly discussed. In Mark 12:35–37 (cf. Matt 22:41–45; Luke 20:41–44) Jesus asks about the discrepancy between the typical view that the Messiah would be the son of David and the address of God to one seated next to God whom David calls “my lord.” According to Bates, since the Gospel authors believe that Jesus is the Messiah and he later identifies himself the figure of Ps 110:1 in Mark 14:62, “Jesus (as portrayed by the synoptic writers) has exegetically construed himself as the person, the ‘my lord,’ addressed by God (the Father) in the text.”<sup>16</sup> In

<sup>12</sup>Bates, *Hermeneutics*, 194–99, 209–12; Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: the Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture*, SNTSMS 178 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2020), 6–11.

<sup>13</sup>Bates, *Hermeneutics*, 216–20.

<sup>14</sup>Pierce, *Divine Discourse*, 20–21.

<sup>15</sup>Ch. 5 of Bates, *Hermeneutics*, focuses on several texts from the later chapters of Romans along with 2 Cor 4:13. His *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and the Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), also treats passages from Hebrews, Acts, and the Gospels, in addition to giving more attention to Early Christian parallels to NT interpretations.

<sup>16</sup>Bates, *Birth*, 49.

Heb 1:13, this text is again introduced with the explicit question of the identity of the addressee: “But to which of the angels has he ever said...?” The context in Hebrews clearly identifies the addressee as Jesus, the Lord and Son.<sup>17</sup> Several patristic authors implicitly interpret Ps 110:1 prosopologically and Irenaeus explicitly puts it in those terms.<sup>18</sup>

Peter Gentry, however, asserts that seeing prosopological exegesis in the NT is anachronistic since the apostles would have been familiar neither with the Hellenistic rhetorical handbooks nor with Jewish interpretive methods that ignore original context and literal meaning, which he believes did not flourish until after 70 AD. He instead argues that the apostles “base their interpretation on resolution within the storyline of Scripture” and “the predictive and prophetic nature of typology.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, William Dernell notes all of the proposed instances of prosopological exegesis in the NT are unmarked, and after considering a few of those passages determines that “covenantally-informed typology seems to better account for the interpretations of the NT authors.”<sup>20</sup> Both Gentry and Dernell seem to hold interpretive presuppositions that rule out proper prosopological readings of the OT.<sup>21</sup>

Bates himself recognizes a kind of typological interpretation in Paul’s reading of certain OT passages, but he argues that a prosopological understanding of other passages is simpler since it does not require an assumption of correspondence between the NT and OT where it is not clearly present.<sup>22</sup> Such disagreements simply show the difficulty in filling the hermeneutical gaps left by NT authors when they cite the OT without describing their method. Nonetheless, Bates’s proposals offer another viable explanation for the hermeneutical assumptions of the apostolic period. Scholars ought

<sup>17</sup>Pierce, *Divine Discourse*, 59–60.

<sup>18</sup>Bates, *Birth*, 166–67.

<sup>19</sup>Peter Gentry, “A Preliminary Evaluation and Critique of Prosopological Exegesis,” *SBJT* 23, no. 2 (2019): 119–20.

<sup>20</sup>William James Dernell, “Typology, Christology and Prosopological Exegesis: Implicit Narratives in Christological Texts,” *SBJT* 24, no. 1 (2020): 151, 154.

<sup>21</sup>Gentry asserts that “the main problem is that if the NT authors are claiming things that an OT text does not clearly intend in its contexts (original, epochal, canonical), then the issue of warrant disappears, and you are never able to show from the OT itself that it was leading us to the NT conclusion” (“Preliminary Evaluation,” 120). Dernell privileges typological explanations based partially on questionable logic: “Typology is broadly recognized as a feature of divine revelation and OT interpretation, whereas there is little evidence, if any, for [prosopological exegesis] in the OT. Given the privileged status of the OT as a means of preaching Christ, it would seem to follow that an event that was preached as a continuation of that history would make use not only of its texts, but also its methods” (“Typology, Christology,” 151).

<sup>22</sup>Bates, *Hermeneutics*, 133–48, 249–53, 300–3.

to be open to the idea that NT authors used the OT in diverse ways and ought to judge each instance on its own merits with a wide range of exegetical techniques open for consideration.

## II. RELEVANCE THEORY

This section focuses on the pragmatics of communication between author and reader. There is something of a divide in the field between those who take an author-focused approach (authorial intention, exegetical technique, theology) and those who take a reader-focused approach (usually a more literary, postmodern intertextuality). NT texts, however, were real acts of communication involving both a real author and real readers/hearers, so it makes sense to address the issue of the interplay between an author's production of a text and the audience's reception of it. Relevance Theory (RT) can help answer some of the major questions more holistically.

Relevance Theory is a comprehensive model of communication that seeks to explain the roles of inference and relevance in a hearer/reader's understanding of an utterance.<sup>23</sup> It proposes that the communicative act of the author can be understood by a reader in context. This focus on both the author's meaning and the reader's process of understanding avoids the pitfalls of an author-centered or reader-centered approach. Steve Smith explains that RT "regards the text as a communicative event where the writer provides everything the reader requires to arrive [at] a certain meaning with minimal effort; however, the fulfillment of this intention of the writer is the responsibility of the reader."<sup>24</sup>

Each reader has a set of premises, a cognitive environment, from which to read the author's communication and draw inferences about its meaning. This cognitive environment includes the context of the utterance and encyclopedic information (e.g., personal beliefs, experiences, cultural values).<sup>25</sup> The reader's and the author's cognitive environment may overlap significantly, which is usually the case in the NT texts, and this overlap

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<sup>23</sup>See the classic work Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). See also Margaret G. Sim, *A Relevant Way to Read: A New Approach to Exegesis and Communication* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), for a basic introduction to RT and its application to biblical interpretation.

<sup>24</sup>Steve Smith, "The Use of Criteria: A Proposal from Relevance Theory," in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, eds. David Allen and Steve Smith (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 152.

<sup>25</sup>Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 38–46.

may increase as the reader makes her way through the author's communication.<sup>26</sup> Both reader and author assume that the communication is understandable to the reader, and this provides the basis for the reader's use of their context to make inferences about the author's meaning.<sup>27</sup> An author, wanting to be understood, "will write in such a way that the author believes will minimize the processing effort of the reader to reach the communicator's goal."<sup>28</sup> A reader will try to get the most cognitive effect (an answer to a question, increased knowledge, etc.) from the text for the least amount of effort. In other words, once a reader comes to a meaningful understanding of the author's communication in conjunction with her cognitive environment, she will stop seeking for a better understanding.<sup>29</sup>

The application of this theory of communication to the OT/NT can be especially helpful in explaining the process a reader goes through in identifying and understanding an allusion to another text. This issue of detecting allusions has been one of the sticking points in the field since Richard Hays's proposal of seven tests in his ground-breaking *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*.<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that Hays did not explicitly apply his tests to most of the passages treated in the rest of the book, his methodological proposal set the terms of subsequent discussion.<sup>31</sup> In spite of their influence, "criteria" is really a misnomer, lending a more scientific air to the process than is possible. David Allen notes that "even their most confident proponents recognize that they yield a more subjective than objective assessment."<sup>32</sup> Given such a state of the question with regard to

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<sup>26</sup>Peter S. Perry, "Relevance Theory and Intertextuality," in *Exploring Intertextuality*, eds. B. J. Oropeza and Steve Moyise (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 211.

<sup>27</sup>Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 155–71, 260–79.

<sup>28</sup>Perry, "Relevance," 211.

<sup>29</sup>Smith, "Use of Criteria," 144.

<sup>30</sup>Hays's tests: availability (of source text to author and reader), volume (degree of explicit and distinctive repetition of words or patterns), recurrence (of the source text in the same authorial corpus), thematic coherence, historical plausibility (of the author's understanding and use of the source text), history of interpretation, and satisfaction (does the reading make sense?) (Hays, *Echoes in Letters*, 29–33).

<sup>31</sup>Nor does Hays use them extensively in his more recent work, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor, 2017). The literature discussing criteria is extensive. See the recent review of the field in David Allen, "The Use of Criteria: The State of the Question," in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, eds. David Allen and Steve Smith (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 129–41. For a particularly scathing assessment of Hays's methodology and those who have followed him, see Paul Foster, "Echoes without Resonance: Critiquing Certain Aspects of Recent Scholarly Trends in the Study of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament," *JSNNT* 38, no. 1 (2015): 96–111, who says that "the method could be described as a radical form of modern reader-response" (109).

<sup>32</sup>Allen, "Use of Criteria," 140.



criteria, perhaps RT can help by providing a comprehensive “framework for understanding how readers approach texts.”<sup>33</sup>

Within this framework, in order for a reader to find relevance in an OT intertext she must make a connection “between an utterance and a remembered text within her cognitive environment that yields cognitive effects.”<sup>34</sup> She must recognize a signal to look for an intertext, identify the text, and receive a satisfying level of cognitive effect.<sup>35</sup> Smith identifies four variables that serve as guides for evaluating how likely an intertext is to be identified by a reader. First, the presence and strength of the signal.<sup>36</sup> Second, echoic strength of the intertext, which could involve verbal parallels or shared themes.<sup>37</sup> Third, accessibility of the intertext, which is more than availability or knowledge of the text. This refers to the OT text being the “most manifest context” where the reader can most easily find satisfying cognitive effect.<sup>38</sup> Finally, the fact that the text provides the all-important relevance (maximal cognitive effect for minimal processing effort) indicates that the reader would identify it as the author’s intended intertext.<sup>39</sup> This process grounds the identification of intertexts in the author’s communicative intent, attempting to discern only those references an author intended his audience to recognize and understand rather than trying to recreate the author’s thought process through tracing out overly subtle connections to other texts.<sup>40</sup> While the latter approach can be theologically valuable, from the perspective of RT, it shows that

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<sup>33</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 143. See also Stephen Pattemore, “Relevance Theory, Intertextuality and the Book of Revelation,” in *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*, ed. Philip Noss (Reading, UK: United Bible Society, 2003), 43–60. Nelson R. Morales, *Poor and Rich in James: A Relevance Theory Approach to James’s Use of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2018), uses a process similar to what is described below.

<sup>34</sup>Perry, “Relevance,” 215.

<sup>35</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 146. Perry, “Relevance,” 215.

<sup>36</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 147. A signal may be extrinsic (e.g., introductory formula, change in style, grammatical signal like *hoti*), making it more likely the reader will identify the allusion, or intrinsic only to the intertext itself, in which case the reader would only recognize the intertext if it is the most obvious context available.

<sup>37</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 147–48. He notes, however, that shared themes need not point to a text but could point to a common motif or event that exists in the cognitive environment.

<sup>38</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 148. If the proposed OT text is not “the most manifest context” to satisfy a reader’s search for cognitive effect, then the reader would have discovered relevance already in another text, motif, event, or theological idea.

<sup>39</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 149. He recognizes that these guides overlap somewhat with some of Hays’s criteria but argues that they function differently because “the guides to interpretation are evaluated together as part of [an] overall theory of communication,” which “allows consideration of how important individual elements are on a case-by-case basis” (152).

<sup>40</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 151.

“scholars have a tendency to over-process an utterance and exceed optimal relevance.”<sup>41</sup>

Since RT tries to explain the processes of real authors and readers, one must reckon with several complicating factors that provide fodder for ongoing work in the field. First, original readers of NT texts differed in their cognitive environments due to education, socio-economic level, and religious background, among many other factors. While not working from the perspective of RT, Christopher Stanley has investigated how different readers/hearers in the original audience might vary in ability to identify, understand, and test Paul’s OT references.<sup>42</sup> The more we are able to discover the way different groups in the ancient world encountered texts, the more we will be able to apply RT more fully.<sup>43</sup> Second, real readers/hearers sometimes encounter the same text on multiple occasions, which might also include teaching or discussion. If NT authors intended this repeated exposure to happen, they may have included some subtler allusions that were more likely only to be understood upon subsequent readings.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the emphasis on the cognitive context of both author and reader places significant weight on one of the perennial issues of the OT/NT—early interpretation of the OT outside the NT. Common interpretations of OT texts may have formed part of the cognitive environment that determined a reader’s ability to detect and understand allusions. This is especially true for Jewish readers, but can also include Gentiles who spent time in the synagogue context. Without extensive knowledge of interpretive traditions, we will not be able to determine adequately if a reader was more likely to find relevance in the OT text itself or in common themes, motifs, and figures that had been taken into the cultural milieu that contributed to the author’s and reader’s encyclopedic information.<sup>45</sup> We ought to continue to push for fuller descriptions of common interpretive associations connected to influential OT texts, figures, and events.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Perry, “Relevance,” 215.

<sup>42</sup>Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). His main description of the diversity of the audience is in ch.3, which he then applies in later chapters to specific texts. See also *Sim, Relevant Way*, 43–44.

<sup>43</sup>The section of this article on ancient media studies below is relevant in this respect.

<sup>44</sup>Smith, “Use of Criteria,” 151.

<sup>45</sup>Craig A. Evans, “Listening for Echoes of Interpreted Scripture,” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), 47–51, draws attention to this shortcoming in Hays’s *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, a critique which Hays essentially accepts as valid (“On the Rebound: A Response to Critiques of *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*,” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, 70–75).

<sup>46</sup>Chs. 4 and 5 of Leroy Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of*

### III. ANCIENT MEDIA CULTURE

Advances in the study of orality and memory over the last two decades hold great promise for the OT/NT. Although most scholars writing on the OT/NT recognize it to be inaccurate, much of their work assumes an anachronistic picture of a NT author sitting with paper and pen to write his letter or narrative, accompanied by a nearby collection of his favorite OT books. Every so often, he consults them and quotes from them as desired. Also assumed is a literate early Christian reading the document for themselves, perhaps even consulting the Scriptures to compare citation accuracy and context. Methodology in OT/NT must be based on a more accurate picture of the roles that orality and memory play in both the production and reception process.

1. *Production.* David Carr has drawn attention to the fact that, even in scribal transmission, orality and memory are intertwined with the textual and visual aspects of the process: “On the one hand, biblical texts and similar texts in other cultures were ‘oral’ in the sense that they were memorized, and—in certain cases—publicly performed. On the other hand, written copies of these texts were used in this process to help students accurately internalize the textual tradition, check their accuracy and correct it, and/or as an aid in the oral presentation of the text.”<sup>47</sup> Scribes were trained not only to copy texts but also to memorize large portions. The memorized text and the written text coexisted and shaped each other over time. Even in the actual moment of transcription, a scribe created a mental version of the relevant portion of text before adding it to the new copy.<sup>48</sup> This process introduced minor variations into subsequent manuscripts, which Carr refers to as memory variants—“the sorts of variants that happen when a tradent modifies elements of the texts in the process of writing or otherwise reproducing it from memory, altering elements of the text, yet producing a meaningful whole (‘good variants’).”<sup>49</sup> These memory variants include small omissions, transpositions, synonym

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*Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), are exemplary in this regard though working from a different methodology than RT.

<sup>47</sup>David Carr, “Torah on the Heart: Literary Jewish Textuality within Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010): 18–19. See his *Formation of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 13–36, for a fuller description of textuality and orality in the ancient world.

<sup>48</sup>John Screnock, *Traductor Scriptor: The Old Greek Translation of Exodus 1–14 as Scribal Activity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 177–79. Screnock’s work shows that the same phenomenon holds true for the translation of the OT in the Old Greek manuscripts.

<sup>49</sup>Carr, *Formation*, 17.

substitutions, form changes, and more. All of this, of course, was happening in transmission of the OT long before the NT writers ever received the text, whether orally or textually. Nonetheless, this intertwining of the oral and the written can shed light on how the NT texts were written.

The NT authors' use of memory should be given its due weight, especially considering that the physical characteristics of scrolls and the use of *scriptio continua* made *ad hoc* consultation of the Scriptures difficult.<sup>50</sup> Even when scholars assume the anachronistic scene described at the beginning of this section, it is often difficult to tell if an author is translating from the Hebrew or quoting from the OG/LXX because the quotation matches neither the OG/LXX nor an isomorphic translation from Hebrew. One of the issues, of course, is that we are working with incomplete data; we do not possess all of the variant manuscripts in Hebrew or Greek that were present in the first century.<sup>51</sup> Often, the differences are attributed to an author's choice of a variant reading that fits his theological argument or to the author's purposeful adjustment of the citation, perhaps to make an intertextual connection to yet another OT passage.<sup>52</sup> It has also been argued that an author's favored manuscript tradition may be discovered from such differences.<sup>53</sup>

Although, some have suggested that the NT author may have been quoting from memory, this suggestion has usually been made without evidence.<sup>54</sup> The research on memory variants cited above, however, can provide a basis for deciding which variations could occur from memory. In addition, John Screnock has argued that the processes of transmission and translation are essentially the same and that these processes both produce the same sort of small variations introduced by memory. Thus, when

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<sup>50</sup>Catrin H. Williams, "How Scripture 'Speaks': Insights from the Study of Ancient Media Culture," in *Methodology in the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, eds. David Allen and Steve Smith (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 54.

<sup>51</sup>R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 26.

<sup>52</sup>An appeal to memory would not rule out intertextual connections to other passages by way of slight changes in a quotation, but these connections made by way of common vocabulary or themes are just as likely to be made in the memory. Williams, "How Scripture," 64–65, notes that "the evocation—in combined or conflated quotations—of multiple scriptural texts on the basis of their thematic and/or lexical correspondence was not necessarily the result of authors' direct and visual engagement with texts in written form (given the practical difficulties of search for 'distant' passages in literary scrolls) but the product of mnemonic processes."

<sup>53</sup>See M. J. J. Menken, *Matthew's Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

<sup>54</sup>Andrew Montanaro, "The Use of Memory in the Old Testament Quotations in John's Gospel," *NovT* 59, no. 2 (2017): 150.

looking at an OG text, one cannot tell when a change has been introduced by the translator and when it was present in the Hebrew *Vorlage*.<sup>55</sup> This observation can be applied to the OT/NT problem. Thus, we could argue that when a NT author's quotation of the OT shows similar variations, it is possible that his quotation accurately represents an unknown Hebrew or Greek *Vorlage*, but it is just as likely that he is quoting from memory and the differences are simply a result of that process. This means that scholars ought first to rule out the possibility of memory variants before arguing that an author has intentionally quoted a passage in a particular form.

Paul's quotation of Hab 2:4 in Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11 is a classic example of this thorny issue. The MT (followed by Qumran) reads, "the righteous one will live by his faith," but the Greek reading says, "the righteous one will live by my faith."<sup>56</sup> Paul's quotation omits both possible pronouns. According to Richard Hays, Paul's adaptation of the passage in Rom 1:17 "yields a complex semantic transformation," resulting in ambiguity which "allows the echoed oracle to serve simultaneously as a warrant for two different claims that Paul has made in his keynote formula of the gospel: in the gospel *God's own righteousness* is revealed; and the gospel is the power of God for salvation *to everyone who believes*."<sup>57</sup> Before placing so much exegetical weight on the absence of a pronoun, one ought first to consider seriously that such an omission is typical of memory variants.

Andrew Montanaro has applied the idea of memory variants to the OT quotations in John, about half of which differ in some degree from their source.<sup>58</sup> He argues that many of the variations are of the sort to be expected when working from memory, while the quotations without variation "come mostly from the Psalms, probably due to the constraints of psalmic poetry that facilitate memorization."<sup>59</sup> Such a method ought to be applied more broadly to the NT to provide a baseline for judging which variants in quotations are more or less likely to reflect the authors' intentional interpretive changes.

2. *Reception*. Orality and memory also play key roles in the reception of OT references by readers and hearers. Given low literacy rates, texts were

<sup>55</sup>Screnock, *Traductor*, 175.

<sup>56</sup>See a convenient presentation of the major readings in Susan Docherty, "New Testament Scriptural Interpretation in Its Early Jewish Context," *NovT* 57, no. 1 (2015): 6.

<sup>57</sup>Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters*, 40–41.

<sup>58</sup>Montanaro, "Use of Memory," 147.

<sup>59</sup>Montanaro, "Use of Memory," 167–68, 170.

primarily read aloud or performed for groups by trained readers.<sup>60</sup> With regard to the OT/NT, this oral/aural context raises anew the questions of how many allusions to the OT are intended by the author and whether an oral audience could be expected to identify them. Cynthia Edenburg has noted that a text may bring to mind other passages in a *reader's* memory, which he can later compare after obtaining a copy of the other text. For a *listener*, however, “the role of memory is all the more critical since one must retain the memory of a text as it is performed, while searching through long-term memory in order to retrieve the recollection of the other text evoked by the association.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, listeners are less likely to recognize and understand allusions in context than readers of texts.<sup>62</sup> As Kelly Iverson notes, there may be a difference in how much allusive material is intended by the author and how much is detected by a listening audience.<sup>63</sup>

One must also recognize varied levels of literacy among the recipients of NT texts. Stanley evaluates the effectiveness of Paul's scriptural quotations, noting that varied levels of literacy and access to physical texts resulted in different levels of understanding among the audience members.<sup>64</sup> He observes that many of Paul's quotations from the OT may not expect much knowledge of the Scriptures at all since Paul gives his own interpretation of the quoted texts. In other instances, however, “Paul may have targeted the more literate members of the congregations (especially those with more exposure to Judaism) on the assumption that they would explain to the illiterate majority the significance of the verses that he cites.”<sup>65</sup> The possibility of interaction between audience members is an important

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<sup>60</sup>See the essays in Holly Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), for an overview.

<sup>61</sup>Cynthia Edenburg, “Intertextuality, Literary Competence and the Question of Readership: Some Preliminary Observations,” *JSTOT* 35, no. 2 (2010): 137.

<sup>62</sup>Edenburg, “Intertextuality,” 144.

<sup>63</sup>Kelly R. Iverson, “An Enemy of the Gospel? Anti-Paulinisms and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Unity and Diversity in the Gospels and Paul: Essays in Honor of Frank J. Matera*, eds. Christopher W. Skinner and Kelly R. Iverson (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 30. It is also worth considering that references to texts of different genres may be more or less detectable and more or less meaningful. James McGrath, “Orality and Intertextuality,” in *Exploring Intertextuality: Diverse Strategies for New Testament Interpretation of Texts*, eds. B. J. Oropeza and Steve Moyise (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 179–80, asserts that “the main function of using a hymn quotation is therefore not necessarily to call to mind other parts of the hymn but to fix the points made in conjunction with the quotation in the mind of the hearer. This may be less true of literary as opposed to hymnic allusions where the point may actually be to call to mind a whole story through an allusion to a single line or turn of phrase.”

<sup>64</sup>Stanley, *Arguing*, 38–59.

<sup>65</sup>Stanley, *Arguing*, 58–59. The same possibility can be applied to allusions as well. Those more able to detect allusions in the oral presentation of a letter or narrative could share insight with others.

point. The idea of a singular performance with no further interaction over a text may be just as inaccurate as the above anachronistic model of a purely textual/literate situation. Catrin Williams points out that “several different scenarios can be envisaged, such as multiple recitations of a text within a communal framework, explanatory prompts provided by the lector, along with combined ‘reading’ and ‘studying’ activities during or after individual gatherings.”<sup>66</sup>

#### IV. SOCIAL MEMORY

Recognizing that quotations and allusions are produced and received in the context of orality and memory broadens the discussion to consider the social aspects of a remembered past that includes both textual and oral preservation. Work in the area of social memory seeks to describe “the ways in which communities and individuals interpret the past in light of their present social realities”<sup>67</sup> and vice versa.<sup>68</sup> This approach has been more fully applied to the study of Gospel traditions, but it holds great potential for the OT/NT.<sup>69</sup> While interpretation of scriptural texts are involved in the social memory process for early Christian groups, biblical figures and events also function outside of textual contexts in the memory of communities. “Mnemonic scriptural evocations are not inevitably tied to identifiable verses or discrete passages; collective memories linked to Scriptures can be drawn from wide commemorative frameworks and are often filtered through known (textual and extra-textual), related Jewish traditions.”<sup>70</sup>

Philip Esler, for instance, in a treatment of Hebrews 11 notes that the author does not present his remembrance of prominent OT figures as a textual act but as an act of oral memory. He argues, “The lengths taken by

<sup>66</sup>Williams, “How Scripture,” 61. See also Whitney Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 4–5, 143; and Thomas E. Boomershine, “Audience Address and Purpose in the Performance of Mark,” in *Mark As Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, eds. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 115–42, for more on performer and audience interaction.

<sup>67</sup>Williams, “How Scripture,” 65.

<sup>68</sup>See Alan Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity*, eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, *Semeia Studies* 52 (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 1–22, for a concise introduction to this broad field of study.

<sup>69</sup>Allen, “Use of Criteria,” 141, laments the seeming dead end of criteria for detecting allusions and supposes that social memory may “offer a different lens to the allusion discourse, one no longer predicated in terms of criteria,” although he also recognizes that “this may be dangerous ground for a scholarly sub-discipline traditionally honed on textual association and may raise even more pressing questions as to how one can confidently authenticate perceived associations.”

<sup>70</sup>Williams, “How Scripture,” 66.

the author to detextualize the primary source of Israelite tradition that he is employing necessitate jettisoning textual interpretation, let alone intertextuality, as an explanatory framework for his aims or achievement.”<sup>71</sup> The author presents memories of these figures that interpret them as examples of faith and righteousness for his Christian readers, “contesting central aspects of the collective memory of Israel” and establishing “a particular identity for the Christ movement in the present that also possesses a trajectory trailing into the future.”<sup>72</sup>

Tom Thatcher proposes that social memory helps us understand the appeals to Cain and Abel in the NT not as references to specific texts, but as memories of important figures of the past that helped early Christians understand themselves and their opponents.<sup>73</sup> Thatcher applies sociologist Barry Schwartz’s observation that communities “key” the present to the past by aligning contemporary figures and events with similar figures and events of the past, in this case, the scriptural past. Doing so “allows the past to function as a ‘frame’ for present experience, providing patterns of coherence that help members of a group make sense of what is happening and determine appropriate responses.”<sup>74</sup> He argues that early Christians used the Cain and Abel memories to assert their righteousness in the midst of persecution (Matt 23:35; Luke 11:51; Heb 11:4; 12:24) and to validate their beliefs as orthodox during intra-group disputes (Jude 11; 1 John 3:12).<sup>75</sup>

Social memory theory does not invalidate the study of the OT in the NT, but it instead places it in the broader social context of early Christianity where memories of all sorts were used to shape identity and give direction for the future. It can show that appeals to scriptural figures were not always allusions to texts; sometimes they are appeals to collective memory. For those passages that possess a closer verbal parallel to OT texts so as to be recognized as true textual allusions, this approach can shed light on the social uses of such textual memories. As Thatcher notes, social memory theory can help us “understand ‘typology’ not simply in terms of the relationships between texts, but also in terms of the social

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<sup>71</sup> Philip F. Esler, “Collective Memory and Hebrews 11: Outlining a New Investigative Framework,” in *Memory, Tradition, and Text*, 165. See also Esler “Paul’s Contestation of Israel’s (Ethnic) Memory of Abraham in Galatians 3,” *BTB* 36, no. 1 (2006): 23–34.

<sup>72</sup> Esler, “Hebrews 11,” 171.

<sup>73</sup> Tom Thatcher, “Cain and Abel in Early Christian Memory: A Case Study in ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New,’” *CBQ* 72, no. 4 (2010): 732–51.

<sup>74</sup> Thatcher, “Cain and Abel,” 738.

<sup>75</sup> Thatcher, “Cain and Abel,” 742–49.



circumstances in which the connections between prophecy and fulfillment are established.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, work on orality and memory in the ancient world and on social memory can help us to acquire a more realistic picture of the way that Scripture functioned in the context of early Christianity. These new approaches need not be seen as inimical to the field of the OT in the NT, but can be received as helpful correctives that expand the horizons of the field.<sup>77</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

A major challenge within the field of the OT/NT is handling the diffuse methodologies that may be relevant. We must not only have sufficient knowledge of them; we must also discern their value and find a way to weave them together to apply them where appropriate. Certainly, one can simply choose a particular methodology with which to make a contribution to the field, but a more holistic approach is needed to render a full picture of the OT/NT. To this already crowded collection of tools must be added approaches like prosopological exegesis that place the OT/NT more fully into a diachronic view of OT interpretation in the early church, a linguistic framework like RT that provides a unified theory of communication, and a more complete reckoning with ancient media culture and social memory. These will not be the last applications of newer methodologies to this exciting subdiscipline, but they do help us take a few steps forward in understanding the OT/NT as a real-world phenomenon produced and experienced by actual people in the first-century Mediterranean context.



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<sup>76</sup>Thatcher, “Cain and Abel,” 751.

<sup>77</sup>Williams, “How Scripture,” 69, says, “Media-sensitive approaches of the kind outlined in this study are not necessarily incompatible with predominantly text-orientated methods, nor do they strive to replace literary-based models, but they do open up the field of OT/NT studies to a whole host of different questions and to promising new methods of enquiry.”