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CHRISTICONIC INTERPRETATION*

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE PREVIOUS ARTICLE, I SHOWED THAT the text itself gives us its thrust—what it is all about, what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, the pragmatics of the text.[1] Only by catching these *doings* of the author can we arrive at valid application. Or to put it in the words of Paul Ricoeur, the biblical canon as a whole projects a *world in front of the text*[2]—God's ideal world, individual segments of which are portrayed by individual pericopes.[3] Thus each sermon on a particular pericope is God's gracious invitation to mankind to live in his ideal world by abiding by the *thrust* of that pericope—the requirements of God's ideal world as called for in that pericope's world-segment. And as mankind accepts that divine invitation, week by week and pericope by pericope God's people are progressively and increasingly inhabiting this ideal world and abiding by divine will.

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1 See Abraham Kuruvilla, "Pericopal Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173 (January–March 2016): 3–17.

2 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation,* ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 141–42.

3 Though "pericope" has the technical sense of a demarcated portion of the Gospels, I use the word in this series of articles simply to designate a preaching text, irrespective of genre or length.

And because this world in front of the text speaks of God and how he relates to his creation, I call this thrust and this world the theology of the pericope. Each sermon, then, must point out the theology of the pericope under consideration, elucidating what that specific text affirms about God and his relationship with mankind: the values of *the* world in front of the text. Biblical interpretation for preaching and application that does not discern this intermediary, pericopal theology, is *de facto* incomplete, for without discerning this entity, valid application can never be discovered. I defined pericopal theology this way: *Pericopal theology is the theology specific to a particular pericope—representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God in his relationship to his people—which functions as the crucial intermediary in the move from text to application.*

Here are the two steps of preaching again:

Figure 1: Scheme of preaching

One pericope at a time, the various aspects of Christian life are gradually being brought into alignment with the will of God for the glory of God. God's Word is being applied, and God's world is becoming reality. This is the goal of preaching.

PERICOPAL THEOLOGY DISTINGUISHED

So how does pericopal theology differ from systematic and biblical theology (at least as they are commonly defined)?[4] Systematic theology draws conclusions deductively from one text and integrates those with deductions from other texts, slotting them all into a variety of theological categories. D. A. Carson defines systematic theology as "the branch of theology that seeks to elaborate the whole and the parts of Scripture, demonstrating their . . . connections."[5] By virtue of this connecting and correlating activity, systematic

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[4] For more details, see Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 113–16.

[5] D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon,* ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 69–70.

theology operates at a level that is more general than does pericopal theology. The latter, on the other hand, is more inductively derived and is constrained by the particulars of a single pericope. It deals with matters pertaining to God and his relationship to his creation as proposed in *that* pericope; so it is an expression of the divine demand in *that* text, which the people of God must abide by if they are to inhabit God's ideal world.

The operation of biblical theology also tends to be more general than that of pericopal theology, for it develops broad biblical themes across the canon, with a strong emphasis on timelines. According to Sidney Greidanus, "biblical theology . . . helps us trace longitudinal themes from the Old Testament to the New."[6] Invariably, then, the preacher employing biblical theology as the basis for sermons will find that several pericopes, especially adjoining ones, deal with the same general themes of biblical theology, potentially resulting in the same sermon week after week. Seeing a text in the wider historical context of the canon, for which biblical theology is certainly helpful, is not the same as seeing how a particular pericope makes a specific demand on its reader as it projects a segment of the ideal world of God. "Biblical theology involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation."[7] But big canonical pictures tend to miss the small pericopal miniatures. And it is these miniatures (i.e., the theology of the individual pericopes) that are essential for the week-by-week life-changing transactions of preaching.

For instance, Mark 8 relates the healing of a blind man. If we preach this text as demonstrating Jesus's power over the retina, optic nerve, and occipital cortex, what will we do in Mark 10, when Jesus heals another blind man? Or the two feedings of thousands in Mark 6 and Mark 8? Mark is doing two different things with each of the blind healings and with each of the crowd feedings.[8]

So, on the one hand, with systematic or biblical theology as the basis of individual sermons, distinctions between the theological thrusts of successive pericopes are harder to maintain. Operating, as these species of theology do, at a level of generality somewhat

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[6] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 267.

[7] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 22.

[8] See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 129–41, 155–68, 226–37.

removed from the specificity of the text and the intricacy of its details, sermons on contiguous pericopes will often have similar goals and applications. On the other hand, the sequential preaching of pericopes based on pericopal theology would not be impeded by this handicap. The particular theological thrust of each pericope would be heard clearly without the weekly tedium caused by the repetition of the broad themes of biblical and systematic theology.

Pericopal theology thus helps bring specific portions of the biblical text to bear upon the situation of the hearers, thereby aligning congregation to canon, God's people to God's Word. Pericope by pericope, the community of God is increasingly oriented to the will of God as it progressively inhabits the projected canonical world. But with this specificity of pericopal theology, how would one make a sermon christological, particularly when the pericope is from the Old Testament?

CHRISTOCENTRIC INTERPRETATION

During the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in 2014, I had the privilege of presenting in a session that dealt with the interpretation of the David and Goliath story from 1 Samuel 17 from multiple hermeneutical viewpoints, one of which was a christocentric view. Christocentric readings interpret biblical texts such that they are directly and explicitly related to the Second Person of the Trinity and the cross; thus, every pericope is somehow connected with the redemptive work of Christ.

A small, unknown shepherd defeating a big, bad giant lends itself to the typology of the Isaiah 53 servant (Jesus Christ) defeating sin (and/or Satan). According to the sixth-century bishop Caesarius of Arles, Jesse sending David with food (1 Sam. 17:17) becomes God sending his Son with the Decalogue (*ten* loaves) and the Trinity (an ephah of roasted grain, a quantity of *three* measures) to free his people from the power of the devil. And the lion and the bear defeated by David typified the devil.[9]

Modern-day interpreters have been no less prone to speculative tendencies. Noting that 1 Samuel 17:5 has Goliath wearing "*scale*-armor," one scholar declared: "The fact that he is described as wearing 'scales' indicates that Goliath was a serpent. Once again there is a serpent in the garden-land of Israel. . . . David was the new Adam that Israel had been waiting for, the beast-master taking dominion over bears and lions and now fighting a 'serpent.' "

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9 Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 121*, §1–5.

And so, appropriately enough, "[Goliath] died like a serpent, with a head wound."[10] Indeed, one of my co-presenters at last year's ETS meeting posited that "[David's] triumph over Goliath foreshadowed the Messiah Jesus, who would 'come in the name of the Lord' (Ps. 118:25–26) to defeat Satan as the final royal 'seed of the woman' and champion of his people," an interpretation following Maximus of Turin in the fourth century.[11] He therefore connected David's employment of a stone to defeat Goliath with the stone in Psalm 118. In the New Testament, the "cornerstone" in this psalm becomes Jesus, so David killing Goliath was seen as symbolizing the work of Jesus. Such christocentric operations tend to find Christ in every pericope of Scripture.

According to Mohler, one should preach the cross in every sermon, no matter what the text: "Preach the Word, place it in its canonical context, and 'make a bee-line to the cross.'"[12] Mohler's remarks typify the christocentric tendencies of such interpreters: "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too. From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him."[13] It is hard to defend a stance that locates Christ in every word, verse, and story without the interpreter engaging in some hermeneutical acrobatics. An examination of some of the verses commonly used to substantiate christocentric interpretation follows.

LUKE 24:13–27, 44–48

Luke 24:13–27 and 44–48 are frequently cited to validate christocentric preaching. Examining that text, one must ask what the extent of "in all the Scriptures" (24:27) actually is: Is it every portion of Scripture or every book or every pericope or every paragraph or every verse or every jot and tittle? The subsequent statements by Jesus to the Emmaus disciples in Luke 24 suggest that what is meant is every *portion* of Scripture—a broad reference to its vari-

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[10] Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003), 98, 100.

[11] Dennis E. Johnson, "'Blessed Is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord': David (Seed of the Woman) vs. Goliath (Seed of the Serpent) (1 Samuel 17)" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19, 2014), 1. See Maximus of Turin, *Sermon 85*, §3.

[12] R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 21.

[13] Ibid., 21, 96.

ous parts, primarily the major divisions: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The parallelism between 24:25, 27, and 44 makes this clear.

24:25			"*all* that the prophets spoke"
24:27	"Moses and with *all* the prophets"	=	"in *all* the Scriptures"
24:44	"Law of Moses and the prophets and psalms"	=	"*all* that was written"

Figure 2: Parallelism in Luke 24:25, 27, 44

Luke's use of "Moses," "Prophets," and "Psalms" indicates that the major portions of Scripture—and specific verses therein—are christologically focused, not that every word, verse, or story is.

Indeed, in 24:27, Jesus mentions only those matters from the Old Testament *that actually concern himself* (τὰ περὶ ἑαυτου; so also in 24:44, "things which are written *about Me,*" περὶ ἐμοῦ). Thus a selectivity and choice of material is explicit in the text. Jesus is not finding himself in *all the texts* of Scripture, but rather finding *just those texts that concern himself* in all the major divisions of Scripture. Indeed, what is striking is that Jesus is not recognized by the two Emmaus disciples as a result of a christocentric lecture from the Old Testament, one delivered by the Lord himself. Instead, what sparks recognition is the sharing of a meal (24:30–31)!

FIRST CORINTHIANS 1:22–23; 2:2; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5

It is also asserted by those in the christocentric camp that "when Paul preached, his message was centered on the cross as the definitive criterion of preaching."[14] As a matter of fact, Paul himself did not preach Christ in every sermon recorded in Scripture: in the one delivered on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22–31), neither Jesus nor the cross is explicitly mentioned. Nevertheless, the apostle's declarations in 1 Corinthians 1:22–23; 2:2; and 2 Corinthians 4:5 have often been used to lend credence to christocentric interpretation and preaching. On closer examination, however, this credence is found to be misplaced. The context of 1 Corinthians 1:22–23 is hard to escape: Paul clearly had an evangelistic purpose in mind—the mention of Jews and Greeks in 1:22–23 (and 24) makes this evident. And, just

[14] Ibid., 43.

prior, in 1:21, Paul had stated that "God was well-pleased to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the proclamation"—obviously an evangelistic goal.[15]

So, too, in 1 Corinthians 2:2, when Paul asserts that he "resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Here he appears to be reminiscing about his earlier visit to Corinth (2:1) on the occasion of the establishment of that local church; and 3:10–11 mentions the laying of the church's foundation by Paul. The focus here, as earlier, is on his preaching for the conversion of unbelievers. It was in the service of this goal of conversion that Paul announced divine wisdom employing divine power. Both "power of God" and "wisdom of God" in 2:5–7 are carryovers from 1:22–24, linking the units and the evangelistic themes and purposes they share.

Likewise in 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul's declaration "we do not proclaim ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord" is again evangelistic, harking back to the days when the church in Corinth was established. Note the references to the gospel being veiled to those who are perishing (4:3) and to the blinding of unbelievers' eyes by "the god of this world" so that they fail to see the light (4:4), as well as the repetition of the darkness/light theme in 4:6. The general point of the discussion in 2 Corinthians is, of course, the vindication of the apostle's ministry; 2 Corinthians 4 is part of that argument, referring its readers to the credentials of his evangelistic ministry amongst them and to others. In a nutshell, the biblical arguments for christocentric preaching are weak.[16]

DAVID AND HIS GIANTS: THE AUTHOR'S DOINGS[17]

In light of my critique of christocentric interpretation, I looked at the David and Goliath story a bit differently than did my fellow panelists. The actual battle-action of David *v.* Goliath is reported in a mere three verses. But the narrative of 1 Samuel 17 takes all of fifty-eight verses in the Masoretic text to say: David killed Goliath. There is no doubt that this dilatation is with purpose. The author

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[15] Acts 5:42–6:1, which describes the disciples "teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ," is also clearly evangelistic, as evidenced by the context of Pentecost and the increase in the number of disciples.

[16] For more on the arguments against a christocentric reading, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 238–69.

[17] Material here is taken from Abraham Kuruvilla, "David *v.* Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is Saying?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58 (2015): 487–506.

is *doing* something with all that he is saying, as is always the case with narrative. 1 Samuel 17 is no exception. The story points to three elements: the stature, resources, and experience of each of the protagonists—the giant, the king, and the youth.

THE GIANT

Goliath's *stature* is fearsome. Taking a cubit as approximately eighteen inches and a span as nine, the Masoretic text's "six cubits and a span" (17:4) has Goliath at nine feet nine inches tall. This is truly a formidable foe.

The list of his *resources* in 17:5–7 is the longest description of military gear in the Old Testament. These weapons must have intimidated a meagerly equipped Israelite army; in an earlier battle only the Israelite king and his son possessed swords and spears (13:22). This huge enemy, Goliath, is therefore well-bedecked, overwhelmingly so. Assuming the biblical shekel to be 0.403 ounces, the giant's armor would weigh about 126 pounds (17:5), and his spearhead 15 pounds (17:7).[18] On top of this, the shaft of the Philistine's spear is compared to a weaver's beam (17:7).

But it is not only Goliath's stature and resources that threaten; his considerable *experience* also renders him a lethal enemy. Being the individual chosen for one-to-one combat implies Goliath's mastery of this kind of warfare. In fact, Saul himself acknowledges that Goliath has been a "man of war from his youth" (17:33). And one cannot but notice Goliath's audacious taunts and defiance: he is twice recorded as demanding a "man" to come down and fight him (17:8, 10). No one accepts the invitation. No one apparently is "man" enough as Goliath is, a fighter of seemingly lifelong experience, mature and accomplished. Instead, both the nation's king and its soldiers flee in terror (17:11, 24).

In sum, Goliath assumed that his considerable size, his formidable panoply, and his indomitable virility would give him victory over anyone and anything. Stature, resources, and experience would win, he reckoned.

THE KING

If Goliath was sizeable, so was Saul. The king was literally head and shoulders above his compatriots (9:2; 10:23). In other words, Saul had the requisite *stature* to take on the giant.

And if Goliath had intimidating weapons, so did Saul (17:38–39); his *resources* were considerable too. Saul's weapons were likely

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[18] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 175.

to have been the best in the land, ones that only the royal family possessed (13:22). And, rather ironically, the Philistine's belief in the ideology of weapons appears to have been shared by Saul: the king tried to clothe David in his own royal armaments, the description of which is uncannily similar to the inventory of Goliath's weapons.

Goliath's Armor (17:5, 51)	Saul's Armor (17:38–39)
"and a bronze helmet on his head"	"a bronze helmet on his head"
"and scale-armor for his clothing"	"and he clothed him with armor"
"sword"	"sword"

Figure 3: Goliath's and Saul's armor

For victory, you see, one must match helmet for helmet, armor for armor, and sword for sword. Weapons apparently have to be countered with more weapons.

It was not only in stature and resources that Saul was up to the task of fighting Goliath; his military *experience* was nothing to be sniffed at, either. In 17:10, the Philistine giant explicitly "defies" (חרף) the armies of Israel. Curiously enough, the last time "defiance" had shown up in 1 Samuel was when Nahash the Ammonite king threatened to make a "reproach/defiance" (חֶרְפָּה) upon Israel by gouging out each person's right eye (11:2). In response, Saul had to step in and lead the Israelites to victory against Ammon (11:1–15). In fact, it was after this very demonstration of valor that Saul was crowned king (11:15). One might have safely expected that in response to Goliath's *defiance,* Saul, with his experience against such defiance, would again rise admirably to the occasion.

Should anyone have been picked for the task of fighting Goliath, it ought to have been Saul, whose biodata, accoutrements, and résumé fitted the bill exactly. Saul had it all. But, unfortunately, this king of Israel failed to lead his people to victory (17:11, 24).

THE YOUTH

Then we come to David, the youth. As he is introduced into our narrative, he is identified as a "son," the "youngest," and one who "tended his father's flock"—merely a shepherd boy (17:12, 14, 15). Surely he would not be able to accomplish anything noteworthy on

the battlefield, for this lad has no stature, no resources, and no experience, especially compared with Goliath and Saul.

That Eliab was the one who had the "height of stature" that impressed Samuel (16:7) suggests that David lacked the respectable *stature* that Eliab possessed. From all appearances, then, David had no stature.

David not only is lacking in stature, he is deficient in *resources*, too. His inadequacy is explicitly diagnosed by the king: "You are not able . . . to fight with him" (17:33), quite similar to Goliath's challenge as he dared a man to approach him, "if he is able to fight with me" (17:9). Goliath is even more blunt: "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" (17:43). In other words, David has no resources, either.

The extended focus on "men"—and presumably the *experience* of men—in 17:23–25 is remarkable, especially coming right after the youthfulness (inexperience?) of David has been noted in 17:12, 14, and 15. While David speaks with his brothers, the "*man* of the in-between" (אִישׁ־הַבֵּנַיִם, i.e., the champion) reappears on the scene in 17:23 (see also 17:4). The "*men* of Israel" see the "man," Goliath, and flee in fear (17:24). Then the "men of Israel" remark to themselves about "this man" (Goliath) coming up to defy Israel, and how the king will enrich the "man" who defeats him (17:25). David then speaks to the "men," asking about the rewards for the "man" who kills the Philistine (17:26). The people respond, explaining what will be done for the "man" who slays Goliath (17:27). David's older brother, Eliab, overhears David's conversation with the "men" (17:28). And Goliath, himself a "man" (17:4, 23)—in fact, he is a "*man* of war (17:33)—had dared a "man" to come fight him (17:8, 10).

In contrast, David is merely a juvenile, only a "*son* of a man" (17:12), not a man himself, but only a "youth," as Saul is quick to point out. Goliath agrees; later, the giant is peeved to see that the one who accepted his dare was just a "youth" (17:42). Evidently the dispatching of the giant was a task fit only for a virile man, not a raw adolescent—a youth who lacked the necessary qualification of experience.

Thus, as noted earlier, there is a congruence of ideology: everyone else is united in placing their trust in stature, resources, and experience, all of which David seems to lack. And swearing by the notion that stature plus resources plus experience equals triumph, Saul and his army are scared of their own deficiencies in these departments, being completely insensible to the workings of God and the empowerment of God. But David, he is different.

David and His God: The Author's *Doings*

David shows how completely wrongheaded it was to assume that victory comes with a reliance upon stature, resources, and experience. Neither Goliath nor Saul was figuring deity into his calculus. But deity is primary in David's arithmetic—his stature, resources, and experience were founded upon God, and the rest is history.

DAVID'S STATURE: THE HEART OF GOD

As we saw, Samuel, when he went to Bethlehem to anoint Israel's next king, was taken with the stature of Jesse's oldest son, Eliab (16:6–7). Yahweh intervened, forbidding the prophet to look at "his appearance or at the height of his stature," instead declaring that though man looks at the "outside," "Yahweh looks at the heart" (16:7). He then pointed out David (16:12). Here was a candidate whose stature was not visible on the outside. His was an eminence that was an inside reality, a character that was internal, a solidity that was inward—a stature of the "heart." Only such a person was ever described in Scripture as having been "a man after [God's] heart" (13:14; also Acts 13:22). Only such a one could, in the face of imminent danger, exhort his fellow men in our narrative not to lose "heart" (1 Sam. 17:32). This was the stature of David: he had a heart that God saw and approved, the heart of God himself.

DAVID'S RESOURCE: THE NAME OF GOD

And David's resources? Saul declared that David was "not able to go" against the giant without appropriate resources (17:33). David countered that he was actually "not able to go" *with* armor and helmet and sword (17:39). And so he proceeded to take them all off. The interlude of 17:38–39, David's donning and doffing of Saul's armor, comic though it is, conveys an important facet of the theological thrust of this pericope: the repudiation of the ideology of arms. Impressive firepower would not be the objects of David's trust. What, then, would be David's resources to fight the giant?

At the start of the story, the narrator was careful to describe Goliath's armaments, *five* in number: helmet, armor, greaves, scimitar, and spear (17:5–7). David, rejecting Saul's donation of similar equipment, opts instead for the shepherd's paraphernalia. He goes into battle with *five* items himself: stick, stones, bag, pouch, sling (17:40)—an ironic rejection and reversal of the catalogue of weapons possessed by Goliath (and by Saul). And the number of stones David picked up? *Five!* This narrative thereby pillories the world's ideology of resources. That it would not be these standard resources that would down the giant is made abundantly clear. Instead, it would be God who would provide the victory—*that* was

David's resource: "You come to me with sword, and spear, and scimitar, but I come to you in the name of Yahweh Sabaoth" (17:45).

And so, David, full of confidence in his God, is disinclined to flee in panic as Saul and his army did (17:11, 24). The shepherd boy is showing plenty of moxie. And why not? His trust is in his real resource, God, and in God alone.

DAVID'S EXPERIENCE: THE DELIVERANCE OF GOD

One wonders if Saul had not heard—or, if he had, had he forgotten?—that David himself was a "*man* of war," not to mention "a *man* of form" (i.e., "a handsome man," 16:18). This Israelite youth, son of a Bethlehemite, youngest of the brood, was no little boy: he was a *man,* and a substantial one at that. Where did his experience of manhood come from? The answer is found in David's testimony to Saul about his shepherding past (17:34–37).

The verbal parallels between David's experience of divine deliverance as a shepherd (in the past) and as a warrior (in the future) are striking. David testified that he had "gone out" after the lion and bear (17:35); later, he would "go out" after Goliath (17:55). David "smote" the lion and the bear (17:35 [×2], 36); he promises to "smite" Goliath (17:46) and later actually does so (17:49, 50). The lion and bear "rose" against David (17:35), and Goliath "rises" to attack David (17:48). David "seized" (חזק) the beast (17:35), and David "prevails" (חזק) over Goliath (17:50). He "killed" the animal (17:35), and he "kills" Goliath (17:50, 51). Truly, then, "the uncircumcised Philistine" would "be like one of them [i.e., like the lion and bear]" (17:36). That equation of animal and human beasts of prey is made abundantly clear in the chiastic structure of 17:36–37 (see *A* and *A′*):

A Lion, bear, uncircumcised Philistine (17:36ab)

B The living God (17:36c)

C David (17:37a)

B′ Yahweh (17:37b)

A′ Lion, bear, Philistine (17:37c)

Figure 4: The structure of 1 Samuel 17:36–37[19]

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[19] Modified from Anthony R. Ceresko, "A Rhetorical Analysis of David's 'Boast' (1

Though David began by asserting that he had "delivered" the lamb taken by the bear (17:35), he ended by acknowledging that it was *Yahweh* who had "delivered" him from the "hand" of the lion and the "hand" of the bear, and that it would be *Yahweh* who would, likewise, "deliver" him from the "hand" of the Philistine (17:37; also see 17:46–47). This was the crux of his experience—the deliverance of Yahweh. That David's confidence was well placed is powerfully demonstrated to the reader: in the chiastic structure shown above, while David is literarily surrounded by enemies (*A, A'*), he is at the same time protected by a divine cocoon from them (*B, B'*). David's trust in his God, built by his experience of divine deliverance, is rightly directed.

In sum, the narrative of 1 Samuel 17 is not the story of an underdog versus a top gun, or about Christ defeating Satan. Rather, in this intriguing story of David versus Goliath, we have a remarkable example of authors *doing* things with what they are saying. In, with, and through this narrative, a theological thrust is conveyed. The nuances and the delicate turns and negotiations of the story all contribute to the artful depiction of this theological truth—what the author is *doing:* God's people are to develop the *stature* of a heart for God, exercise faith to engage enemies in the name of God (the ultimate *resource*), and gain the *experience* of the deliverance of God. Catching this thrust of the biblical text is essential before one can move to valid application for life change.

So are the christocentric interpreters plumb wrong? Is there any reason to introduce Christ in our interpretation of 1 Samuel 17 (or of any other Old Testament text)? You might be surprised, but my answer to that is a resounding "Yes!" Yes, Christ is in there, in *every* pericope, of *every* book, of *both* testaments of Scripture. Let me explain.

CHRISTICONIC INTERPRETATION

The goal of preaching is to align God's people with God's requirements in Scripture—pericopal theology—week by week, sermon by sermon. Preaching is God's gracious invitation to his people to live with him in his ideal world, abiding by its values. Since only one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly met all of God's demands, being without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26), one can say that this person, and this person alone, has perfectly inhabited the *world in front of the text,* living by all of its requirements. Jesus Christ alone has comprehensively abided by the theology of every

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Samuel 17:34–37): Some Reflections on Method," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 66.

pericope of Scripture. In other words, each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a characteristic of Christ, showing us what it means to perfectly fulfill, as he did, the particular call of that pericope. The Bible as a whole, the collection of all its pericopes, then, portrays what a perfect human looks like, exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the perfect man. By him alone is God's world perfectly inhabited and by him alone are God's requirements perfectly met. So if the world-segment of a pericope is displaying a facet of Christ's image, then the composite *world in front of the text* (i.e., the integration of all the world-segments projected by individual pericopes—the integration of the theologies of all the pericopes of Scripture) is the complete, plenary image of Christ. Thus, the written Word of God depicts the incarnate Word of God.

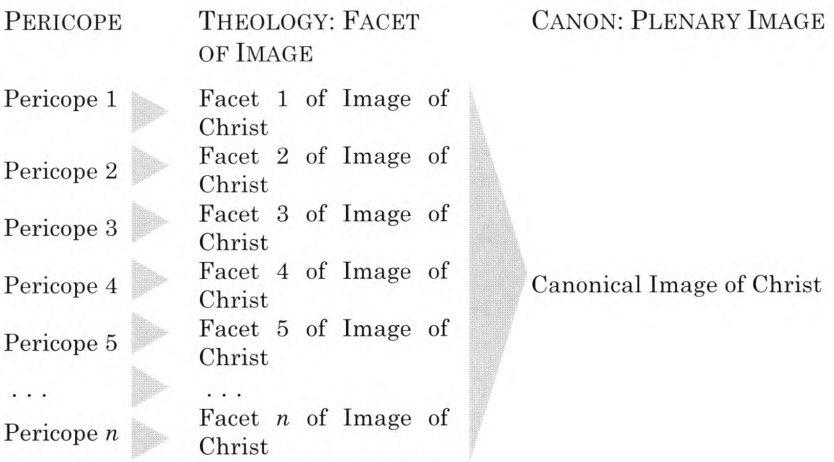

Figure 5: Canonical image of Christ

Thus, sermon by sermon, the children of God become progressively more Christlike as they align themselves to the image of Christ displayed in each pericope. Preaching, therefore, facilitates the conformation of the children of God into the image of the Son of God. After all, God's ultimate goal for his children is that they look like his Son, Jesus Christ, in his humanity—"conformed to the image [εἰκών] of his Son" (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:19; 4:13–16; Col. 1:28). So I have labeled this model of interpretation for preaching *christiconic*. I submit that Scripture is geared primarily for this glorious purpose of God, to restore the *imago Dei* in mankind by offering a theological description of Christlikeness, pericope by pericope, to which God's people are to be aligned. In this sense, the focal point of the entire canon of Scripture and all of its pericopes is the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect man and the paramount *imago*

Dei himself (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). And "it is the destined goal of all the children of God 'to be conformed to him.'"[20]

This is why 2 Timothy 3:16–17 declares that "all Scripture is profitable" to render every person mature—i.e., Christlike—to "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). And thus believers gradually become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), a privilege to be consummated on the day of glory. But even in this life, pericope by pericope, the child of God is gradually being conformed to the image of Christ. This is the purpose of preaching: "We proclaim Him, instructing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, that we may present every person mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

I liken preaching, then, to hypothetical, weekly visits to a doctor. Say you are visiting me, a dermatologist, this week. I might tell you how to take care of your dry skin. Next week, if you return, I might advise you on how to take precautions in the sun. The week after that, you might be given recommendations regarding your moles. After that, I'd offer tips on how to care for your hair, then your nails, and so on. As you follow my recommendations, your dermatological status improves week by week, and you are well on your way to developing perfect skin—cutaneous impeccability![21] After several weeks of this, you might decide to visit your cardiologist. The first week she might tell you all about controlling your blood pressure. The week after that, how to maintain an exercise regimen. Then, how to control your cholesterol with diet and a prescribed statin. And so on, week by week, until you attain to a perfect cardiovascular state. You might then move on to a endocrinologist, and after a few weeks of that, a gastroenterologist or a nephrologist, and so on. In short, slowly and steadily, you are being perfected in health.

So also for preaching. Week by week, sermon by sermon, as God's people align themselves to the requirements of the pericopes preached, to the values of their world-segments (i.e., pericopal theology), they are being molded, slowly and steadily, into the image of Christ, the only one who fully abided by the theology of all pericopes and who perfectly inhabited the *world in front of the text.*[22] Thus in a christiconic hermeneutic, the image of Christ portrayed

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[20] Calvin, *Institutes* 3.8.1 (author's translation from Latin).

[21] In line with Ephesians 5:27.

[22] As with clinic visits that assume sound medical advice from the doctor and diligent compliance from the patient, the success of preaching assumes faithful work on the part of the preacher and conscientious application on the part of the listener.

in Scripture is not exhausted by the Gospels or even by the rest of the New Testament. Rather, the entire canon is necessary to portray the plenary image of Christ. It is through the entire corpus of Scripture that we learn what it means to be Christlike. This, I submit, is the primary function of Scripture and, therefore, the primary purpose of preaching.

PREACHING IS TRINITARIAN

Christiconic preaching also becomes Trinitarian in concept and function. Looking at the three entities that constitute the preaching schema—text, pericopal theology, and application—each one is related to a person of the Trinity, making the whole endeavor Trinitarian. The text inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21) depicts Jesus Christ, the Son, to whose image mankind is to conform (Rom. 8:29). In so being conformed, the will of God the Father is done and, in a sense, his kingdom is coming to pass (Matt. 6:10).[23]

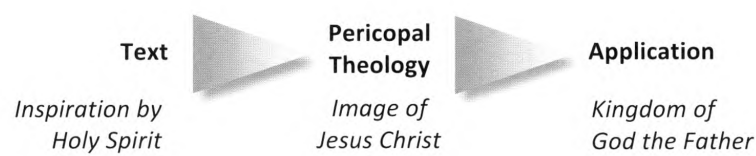

Figure 6: Trinitarian preaching schema

Thus, preaching is for the transformation of lives, that the people of God may be conformed to the image of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of Scripture, by the agency of the preacher. Week by week, sermon by sermon, pericope by pericope, habits are changed, dispositions are created, character is built, and the image of Christ is formed until humans become fully and completely what humanity was meant by God to be.

In the next article in this series, we begin to look at the *implications* of this hermeneutic for pastoral ministry.

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[23] Of course, the arrival of this kingdom in all its fullness and glory awaits the Second Advent.

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