

**A Reaction to *The Pastor As Exegete*  
By Pastor Harland H. Goetzinger**

When a seminarian begins his exegetical studies on this hill, three levels of importance are impressed upon him. He is told being an exegete is important *for his own faith*. He is told being an exegete is important *for his ministry of preaching and teaching* God's Word. He is told being an exegete is important *for his church body*. We do not tell young seminarians these things to frighten them, as if the preservation of the Word depended on their exegetical skill. We do not tell them these things to inflate their egos, or ours for that matter, as if this is the only pastoral training school and we are the only pastors who engage in exegetical studies. We tell them the importance of exegesis because exegesis is one of our chances to glorify God. It is a way for us to sing *In Trembling Hands* (CW 199) because, indeed, into our trembling hands God has placed a Word that is "like fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (Jer 23:29), and we are humbly thankful for being entrusted with such a force. We tell young seminarians being an exegete is important because in order for us to be the best pastors we can be and the best brothers we can be, we pastors need to be exegetes.

I heard the importance of being a pastoral exegete in Pastor Goetzinger's essay. "Yes, the work of an exegete is weighty business" is a refrain (pp. 2, 18, 30, 32). Weighty, yes. A burden, no. For in the exegesis of Scripture a busy pastor takes the weekly opportunity to commune with his God, to glorify him, and to be blessed by him. Allow me to highlight the points Pastor Goetzinger made that coincide with the three levels of importance for exegesis that we try to impress upon seminary students.

**Exegesis Is Important for Your Own Faith**

Pastor Goetzinger takes us back to his early seminary days and his junior year hermeneutics class to remind us that good exegesis cannot take place without a biblical hermeneutic. In so doing he relates the primary objective for all the biblical theology courses we have in our curriculum: that the student would grow in his faith. "Our New Man was made stronger" (p. 3), so says our essayist as he thinks back to those classes. The same could be said of a veteran pastor who incorporates exegetical work into his sermon study. His spirit is fed as he takes Luther's example (p. 7) and shakes each biblical branch and looks under each *λόγος* leaf. A pastor's devotional time should never be limited to his sermon study, it is true. But let it

never be said that a pastor's sermon study cannot be devotional. An unhurried, thorough exegetical approach to a sermon text adds to the devotional atmosphere of the pastor's study. It helps him appreciate "that this is God speaking" (p. 27). And when God speaks into our souls, our faith grows.

Pastor Goetzinger's point about the connection between exegetical theology and practical theology on pp. 27-28 reminded me that I cannot expect to pour out any blessings on my people through counseling and evangelism when I am not being poured into with blessing through exegetical and devotional study of the Word. God fills us to overflowing through exegesis.

### **Exegesis Is Important for Your Preaching and Teaching**

It occurs to me that this area, preaching and teaching the Word, is the one where seminarians most see the importance of exegesis. They want to be good preachers and teachers. They want to preach and teach in color, not in black and white. They know exegesis will help them get there. There are several encouragements in the paper for veteran pastors to keep on practicing exegesis in order to keep on preaching and teaching in color. An exegetical approach helps us speak God's words vividly. It also helps us avoid speaking what isn't there by "cobbling together a sermon using overused phrases" (p. 11) that have no connection to the text. Exegesis keeps the pulpit from being transformed into a bully pulpit; it keeps the hobby horses in the barn.

Word study does not equal exegesis. As one of the professors who teach an exegetical method on this campus, I was glad to hear Pastor Goetzinger affirm this proposition in his essay (pp. 20-21). While all the columns and entries on the exegesis worksheet pictured on p. 20 are important, in my estimation it is the far right hand column labeled "Significance" that is most, well, significant. How wonderful it is to hover our cursor over a form and be told that verb is an aorist, but the cursor can't tell us the significance of that aorist. It's force. The impact the inspired apostle was going for which wouldn't be there with the imperfect. The software can identify the mood of that verb in the εἰδὼν clause as subjunctive. Fine. But what's the significance of that combination, that condition, when St. Mark puts it into the leper's request of Jesus at 1:40? Men with exegetical training can answer these questions. They can articulate the significance of these vocables and forms. And their preaching and teaching comes to life.

Thus Pastor Goetzinger's call to mature in our exegetical skill (pp. 22-23). Our hearers will be the better for it. Sermons and Bible classes that open the Scriptures to everyday people in a way that corresponds to their everyday lives, "without causing the listener (or reader) unnecessary processing effort" (p. 23), come from exegetical work on the part of their authors. But exegetical work only stems from work in exegesis. Will we mature or maturate (p. 22)? The more we *practice* exegesis the less we will experience a common pitfall for exegetical dabblers: losing the forest for the trees. When exegetical skill is not honed, exegesis tends to deteriorate into word study, and the words we study tend to block our view of the greater context. In such cases, context is not the only thing lost. So is some of the meaning. This is why the fathers of this school insisted on the *Zusammenhängendes Schriftstudium* approach, a spirit championed throughout this paper and exemplified by the essayist's exegetical approach to an Ephesians text on pp. 25-26. Honest exegesis is heavy on context. Brothers remind brothers of this when they work together in study clubs and other continuing education opportunities.

### **Exegesis Is Important for Your Church**

Through his Holy Scriptures, God gives us our doctrine. Exegesis listens and learns from the Divine Teacher. Preuss' observation in footnote 9 (p. 3) that "doctrine must be the result of sound exegesis" is the core principle of the Wauwatosa Theology we have received from our fathers. Along with the men who made up the golden age of orthodoxy, men whose writings fill up our dogmatics notes and texts, we recognize that "our theology is no better than its biblical basis" and we must continue to "be the last to defend any statement of doctrine not grounded in Scripture" (p. 8). If we want this to be true of our church body, if we want to remain an evangelical Lutheran church firmly rooted in Holy Scripture, we need pastoral exegetes. And exegetical theology must remain the "Queen of the Disciplines" at our seminary.

Pastor Goetzinger concludes his paper with a brief discussion on "the translation issue." It strikes me that the brotherly debate on this issue in the past few years has never risen to the level of fear for our church body's doctrine. Why is that? Because our pastors are exegetes. We have listened to the Divine Teacher by means of an exegetical treatment of his Word, not depending on any one translation, which will always be imperfect, but depending on sound exegesis to say "Thus saith the Lord." Our church will always need pastoral exegetes. Our church must always understand, however, that producing an exegesis is not producing a Bible

translation. Our essayist's remarks on goal audience and successful communication (pp. 31-32) are a gentle reminder for us exegetes to remember what we can and cannot do in the area of Bible translation.

Thank you, Skip. Though we were forced to endure a long, uncomfortable footnote (29) on the "voiding" habits of the koala, nevertheless you used the phrase "attendant circumstance" (p. 9) in a sentence that had nothing to do with participles, thus proving you have exegesis on the brain. I kid you. In all seriousness, what we have in your paper is a fine expression of a busy pastor's love for exegesis because he loves the Word. "Yes, the work of an exegete is weighty business." You have given your testimony that it is a labor of love whereby we glorify God and receive his blessing. For this I am thankful.

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