How Do We Use the Biblical Languages?

Some Reflections on Synchronic and Diachronic Methodology in Semantics, Grammar, and Exegesis with an Excursus on Ἐκκλησία

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Two major areas related to the use of the biblical languages in semantics, grammar, and exegesis are addressed in this paper. The first is related to methodology and considers the issue of synchronic versus diachronic method—a topic which will be illustrated with a discussion of ἐκκλησία. The second area is a somewhat broader topic related to the goal of our use of Greek in biblical studies.

Synchronic vs. Diachronic Methodology

In regards to methodology in terms of language study in general and of lexical semantics in particular (though not restricted to that sub-discipline), there are two foci of study: diachronic study and synchronic study. This is true of any language, ancient or modern, whether related to the NT, the OT, or to neither.[2] In other words, this is not an issue unique to biblical studies.

Diachronic Study

Diachronic study is that which traces the historical development of a language (or some individual aspect of a language, whether a word or a grammatical element, etc.) from its earliest known form or usage up to the particular instance under consideration. To illustrate with lexical semantics, it is possible to trace the historical origin and development of a particular word. The earliest known instance of a word in Greek literature can be identified and a

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[1] This paper consists of about ⅔ of a presentation made at the annual Bible Faculty Summit held this year at Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Watertown, Wisconsin, July 2003. I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues at Baptist Bible Seminary who have read and interacted with material in this paper. Drs. Alan Ingalls and Mike Stallard both read the first part of the paper carefully and made helpful comments, and Drs. Richard Engle and Ken Gardoski did the same for the entire paper. Dr. Bill Arp and his Ph.D. seminars in NT interpretation for each of the past several years have also entertained my discussions of some parts of this paper. As of the "corrected and revised" edition 1.1 of this paper, I also need to express my thanks to Dr. Carl Conrad (now retired from Washington Univ., St. Louis) for his interaction with the paper. He has not only saved me from a *faux pas* in a classical reference (his area of specialty), but has challenged my thinking in several other areas (see particularly n. 35). Please note that there is an abbreviation list at the end of the paper.

[2] In the material that follows I will generally (though not exclusively) restrict myself to the NT and related matters, but none of the statements made in that context should be taken to imply that the issues are restricted to anything unique in the language of the NT.

somewhat connected train of usage may be charted from that instance down to the NT.[3] Thus the earliest instance of ὑπηρέτης ('helper, assistant'[4]) in known Greek literature is found among the sayings of the 7th C. BC Septem Sapientes (i.e., the Seven Sages; Apophthegmata 3.5.2). Of the 703 known uses of this word group, the largest concentration in classical Greek occurs in the 5th C. BC (245 ×), after which it recedes in popularity[5] until revived in the 1st C. BC (242 ×). This is a compound word that could be formed from ὑπό + ἐρέτης.[6] The word ἐρέτης, which is an uncommon word in both classical and koine Greek, can refer to a rower.[7] The subordinate officers on a ship are referred to by the term ὑπηρεσία.[8] Likewise ἐρετμόν is the poetic word for an oar.[9] The word group may come from the root *erə* and could be related to the Sanskrit form *aritár,* 'rower.'[10] All of these historical and etymological factors illustrate diachronic considerations.

The consideration of diachronic factors can play an important role in attempting to determine the meaning of ἅπαξ λεγόμενα.[11] It is often the case that the context of a single use is too ambiguous to provide reliable guidance as to the meaning of a word. In such instances (which are relatively infrequent in the NT), diachronic, etymological considerations are the only

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[3] I say "somewhat connected" since we do not have a complete database. Our evidence is fragmentary and incomplete. There have been many influences of which we have no record and, in the case of individual words, there have almost certainly been instances in which it was used with other meanings than those presently attested for a particular period. This suggests caution regarding too much dogmatism in regards to diachronic evidence. The archaeologist has learned the wisdom of such caution in regards to the material remains of a culture; students of the biblical text have perhaps not been as careful in this regard with their lexicography.

[4] BDAG, 1035.

[5] 4th C., 157 ×; 3d C., 30 ×; and 2d C., 20 ×. Note that this was a quick *TLG* search on the text string υπηρετ and the results were not individually analyzed. Thus there may be false hits included and other forms might have been missed. The point here is not to generate exact statistics but to illustrate the nature of diachronic considerations. (All stats from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* cited in this paper come from *TLG* disk E as searched with Silver Mountain's *TLG Workplace,* v. 9.02.)

[6] This is the etymology assumed by most commentators who discuss it (see examples in Louw and Carson, referenced in n. 30). Some such etymology is probably correct whether the original coinage was ὑπό + ἐρέτης or some other form from the ἐρετ- stem.

[7] The use of ἐρέτης in reference to a rower is seen as early as Homer (Od. 1.280).

[8] Note the change in the most recent supplement to L&S by Glare, p. 302. In the body of the lexicon (p. 1872), ὑπηρεσία is defined as a group of rowers (i.e., a ship's crew).

[9] E.g., Homer, Od., 11.77. (The usual word for oar is κώπη.)

[10] L&S, 686.

[11] *Hapax legomena,* words used only once. This phrase can be used in a looser or more technical sense. In the looser sense, there are 1,940 words which occur only one time in the NT out of a total vocabulary of 5,425 words (per Trenchard's *The Student's Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek NT* [Zondervan, 1992], ix, 198–236; Metzger gives 1,934, citing Morgenthaler's *Statistik* ["Persistent Problems Confronting Bible Translators," *BSac* 150 (1993): 277]), but the vast majority of these occur elsewhere in Greek literature earlier than the NT. In the more technical sense, a *hapax* is a word that occurs only once in the NT and never in previous Greek literature. This number is quite small, probably about two dozen words (Metzger cites this number from private correspondence with Danker ["Persistent Problems," 277 n.5]), though an exact list appears to be rather difficult to find. It is also one which decreases with some regularity as further information comes to light as is evident in the fact that Thayer listed about 300 words unique to the NT when his lexicon was published in 1889 (2d ed.).

recourse—and even then they provide only an educated guess.[12] The classic example is the word ἐπιούσιος in Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our ἐπιούσιον bread."[13] For what sort of bread was Jesus instructing his disciples to ask? Since this word occurs in no known text prior to Matthew's writing[14] and all subsequent uses[15] are in reference to the Lord's Prayer, we have no basis on which to determine the meaning of ἐπιούσιον apart from its etymology. This seems simple: ἐπί + οὖσα [fem. ptcp. of εἰμί], but the two-column entry in BDAG (for a word that occurs only twice in the NT!) demonstrates the wide range of interpretations that can be based on this. Are we to understand it in terms of ἐπὶ οὐσία ("necessary for existence"), or ἐπὶ τὴν οὖσαν ἡμέρα ("for today"), or ἡ ἐπιοῦσα ἡμέρα ("for the following day"), or ἐπιέναι ("bread for the future," or perhaps "the bread that belongs to today").[16] These divergent interpretations show why "etymology is a clumsy tool for discerning meaning... Specification of the meaning of a word on the sole basis of etymology can never be more than an educated guess."[17]

Diachronic study can also be very helpful in some historical, sociological, ethnological, and philological contexts. For example, a broad-scale study of the vocabulary of those languages thought to have descended from Proto-Indo-European suggests, probably correctly, that the original Indo-European community was an inland, agrarian society.[18] Since we have no documentary or other material remains of or even explicit references to an Indo-European culture, this philological evidence is a significant contribution to the theoretical postulate that such a language group with that sort of culture actually existed.

Past generations of Bible students employed a heavily diachronic approach, focusing on "root meanings," etymology, classical Greek usage, etc. Such an approach is exemplified in a

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[12] See the discussion of this matter in Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (2d ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 38–51 as well as the other works cited there.

[13] The same form occurs in the Synoptic parallel, Luke 11:3. This also illustrates the somewhat difficult task of saying just what is a hapax! Although ἐπιούσιον technically occurs twice in the NT, it is generally treated as a hapax since both are the record of a single instance in Jesus' original statement.

[14] Bruce M. Metzger, "How Many Times Does ἐπιούσιος Occur Outside the Lord's Prayer?" in *Historical and Literary Studies,* ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 64–66.

[15] E.g., *Didache,* 8:2.

[16] BDAG, 376–77. These are just the more prominent proposals. BDAG lists several others as well. See also Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:171.

[17] Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 33. It should be noted that diachronic study, *relatively speaking,* has more value in OT studies than in the NT due largely to the quantity of words which are used infrequently. (There are many more *hapax legomena* in the OT than in the NT.) But even there such study based on cognate languages has varying degrees of value based often on how close in time (note the importance of synchronic concerns here) or how similar the cognate language is (e.g., Ugaritic is more valuable than Arabic). Such study may well provide possible explanations—but they are just that, possible, not certain. The degree of probability varies widely.

[18] This conclusion is predicated on the fact that these languages do not share any vocabulary which relates to the sea or maritime terms. The stock of common vocabulary relates to agrarian matters. (See Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 41.) For an overview of Proto-Indo-European and the languages that have descended from it, see David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 144–49.

wide range of writers, from the popular level "golden nuggets" of Kenneth Wuest, to the very technical, diachronic focus of much of TDNT,[19] to the major grammars of that era,[20] to the classic "word study" volumes. Vincent's comments may serve as representative of this older perspective.

> A language ... is a growth out of a people's life; and its words are not arbitrary symbols fixed by decree and vote, but are struck out, as needed, by incidents and crises. They are the formulas in which new needs and first impressions of external facts spontaneously voice themselves, and into which social customs run. *Hence language becomes more picturesque as we recede toward its earlier forms. Primitive speech is largely figurative; primitive words are pictures....* the old words, as they become pressed into the new service and stretched to cover a wider range of meaning, lose their original sharpness of outline. They pass into conventional symbols in the multiform uses of daily speech; they become commonplace factors of a commonplace present, and remain historic only to lexicographers and philologists. *None the less, these words forever carry hidden in their bosom their original pictures and the mark of the blow which struck each into life;* and they will show them to him who lovingly questions them concerning their birth and their history.[21]

We will return to assess the legitimacy of this statement later in the paper.

Synchronic Study

In contrast to a diachronic approach which focuses on development, synchronic study examines language within a particular temporal, cultural setting.[22] What does this word (or this grammatical form/construction) mean in, e.g., first century Palestine in the context of Hellenistic Greek? Although this may initially seem to restrict the scope of study unduly, there is good reason for the restriction. The essence of synchronic study is based on the premise that

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[19] This is especially true of the earlier volumes of *TDNT,* though there are some notable exceptions among individual writers. The major critique of this work and its underlying philosophy is James Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1961) which Silva described as "a trumpet blast against the monstrous regiment of shoddy linguistics" (*Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 18).

[20] Note the title of A. T. Robertson's massive (and very valuable) work: *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (4th ed., Nashville: Broadman, 1923). The reference to "historical research" explicitly and consciously reflects diachronic concerns.

[21] M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament,* 4 vols. ([New York]: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 1:vii, emphasis added. See similar extravagant language in Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (2d ed., 1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 175–76, and in R. C. Trench, *The Study of Words,* rev. A. L. Mayhew (New York: Macmillan, 1891).

[22] This "setting" is not an artificially defined period of time and it may vary considerably from language to language and time to time. As Saussure pointed out, "In practice, a linguistic state occupies not a point in time, but a period of time of varying length, during which the sum total of changes occurring is minimal. It may be ten years, a generation, a century, or even longer" (*Course in General Linguistics,* ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, transl. R. Harris [London: Duckworth, 1983; reprint, Chicago: Open Court, 1986], 99 [142]). (In citations from Saussure, the second page number given in [brackets] is the standardized page number from the 2d French edition of *Cours de linguistitique générale* [Paris: Payot, 1922.)

the speaker/writer of a language is not normally cognizant of the earlier history of his own language. Saussure's classic statement of this is as follows.

> The first thing which strikes one on studying linguistic facts is that the language user is unaware of their succession in time: he is dealing with a state. Hence the linguist who wishes to understand this state must rule out of consideration everything which brought this state about, and pay no attention to diachrony. Only by suppressing the past can he enter into the state of mind of the language user. The intervention of history can only distort his judgment.[23]

This has considerable relevance for biblical studies since our avowed hermeneutical goal is to determine the meaning intended by the author.[24] Of what was he aware as he wrote?[25] What was his conscious understanding of the semantic range of a given word? How was a particular grammatical construction used in his sphere of language experience? What did a particular form mean (both semantically and pragmatically) in his use of the language?[26]

Do words really carry hidden meanings that record their picturesque birth language as Vincent claimed? If such meanings are hidden, then 1. they are unknown to the speaker, and

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[23] Saussure, *General Linguistics,* 81 [117].

[24] The legitimacy of authorial intent as the primary, normative hermeneutical axiom is here assumed. Of the many discussions of this, see E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967).

[25] My statements here should not be taken to deny that a speaker is never aware of some of these factors, but that this is not normally the case and it can never be assumed. If we can demonstrate that an author did indeed have such knowledge, then of course that (diachronic) knowledge is relevant—but at that point it also becomes a synchronic factor since it is part of a contemporary speaker's use of language. As Silva points out, "the root of a word *may* indeed be of value in determining its meaning. But in order to satisfy the principle of synchronic priority it must be shown that the speaker's consciousness is stimulated by that root. In other words, *historical considerations may be of synchronic value, but only if we can demonstrate that the speaker was aware of them"* (*Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 47–48). Silva's following discussion (48–51) considers how such knowledge might be demonstrated. One such factor, e.g., is a high degree of transparency in the etymology, but even this must be qualified.

[26] Another factor that must be considered in the case of the NT is the role of the LXX. Since the early church used the LXX as their Bible, they were very familiar with this older form of the language (though it was still koine). The vocabulary of the LXX often mediated Hebrew meanings through its translation choices in such a way that Greek words acquired new meanings. As an example, the NT use of διαθήκη is significant. Classical Greek usage of this term was not common (judging by the paucity of material in L&S [see note * below]), and normally meant "*disposition* of property by will, *testament*" (L&S, 394–95), i.e., a last will and testament. The normal Greek word for *covenant* was συνθήκη (*convention, compact, treaty,* "mostly in plural as *articles of agreement,* and hence, *covenant, treaty,* between individuals or states" [L&S, 1717]). The LXX chose διαθήκη rather then συνθήκη, which at first glance might seem odd. If there was a normal word for *covenant,* why not use it? The decision appears to have been based on the nature of the two agreements. A συνθήκη was a bilateral, negotiated treaty between equal parties. But this is not at all appropriate as a description of the biblical covenants, for there God is the sole author of the conditions and terms of the covenant. The LXX translators decided to use διαθήκη for בְּרִית, probably because it better represented this unilateral relationship. (The decision probably originated with the translators of the Pentateuch which then became the accepted standard.) See further the discussion in BDAG, 228, s.v. διαθήκη. These are diachronic considerations, yet important ones for NT study due to the role of the LXX. [*A quick check of *TLG* would seem to confirm this conclusion, though the data need to be manually checked. A string search in 8th–1st C. BC for διαθηκ shows only 333 occurrences versus 713 for συνθηκ. For the 3d–2d C. BC (when the LXX was being translated), the numbers are 37 and 161 respectively.]

therefore 2. they are irrelevant for determining meaning. To argue to the contrary would require advocacy of some sort of semantic *sensus plenior.*

In order for any linguistic utterance/text to communicate meaning it must express its content in a manner that is intelligible to both the author and the intended recipient. The contemporary parties must employ the language as it was known and used in their own context and experience. It is a rare individual even today (let alone in the first century) who knows much (if anything) regarding the history of his own language. Previous meanings of words, their etymologies, or obsolete grammatical usages are not part of the general knowledge necessary to speak, write, or read. But even those few who might have such knowledge regarding some aspects of their language are not guided by this knowledge in their ordinary usage.[27] A frequently used example of this is the use of the English word *nice.*[28] Diachronically we can say that this word derives from the French *niais* which in turn came from the Latin *nescius.*[29] Only when the dictionary is consulted do English speakers know this—but even when they do, their discovery that *niais* means "silly" and *nescius* means "ignorant" does not in the least affect their choice of vocabulary when they offer their wife a compliment! Their understanding and use of the English word *nice* remains in the synchronic realm of contemporary English usage.

Even worse is speculative diachronic data not supported by evidence. In the example of ὑπηρέτης cited earlier, and despite some "preachable" definitions and attractive vignettes offered by various NT commentators, ὑπηρέτης does not refer to any sort of "rower" in classical literature.[30] It certainly does not refer to "a rower on the lower bank of a trireme, one of these slaves who pulled at the great sweeps which moved the triremes through the sea."[31] The

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[27] As Silva puts it, "we must accept the obvious fact that the speakers of a language simply know next to nothing about its development; and this certainly was the case with the writers and immediate readers of Scripture two millennia ago. More than likely, even a knowledge of that development is not bound to affect the speaker's daily conversation" (*Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 38).

[28] For example: Black, *Linguistics,* 122; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 28; Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 38; and Anthony Thiselton, "Semantics and New Testament Interpretation," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods,* ed. I. Howard Marshall, 75–104 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 80.

[29] See *OED,* s.v. "nice."

[30] See the summary and illustrations given by J. P. Louw, *Semantics of New Testament Greek* (Chico, CA: SBL/Scholars Press/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 26–27, and Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 29–30. The one *possible* exception in which ὑπηρέτης *might* be translated "rower" is in an inscription (*SIG* l.c.), but is judged to be dubious by the editors (L&S, 1872 c.2). Related forms do refer to rowing in some sense, but one ought not to assume that such associations can be transferred to ὑπηρέτης without evidence of actual usage. The result of doing so is speculative at best.

[31] William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians,* Daily Study Bible (2d ed., Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 40. See also John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 96; commenting on 1 Cor. 4:1, he defines ὑπηρέτης as "the lowest galley slaves, the ones rowing on the bottom tier of a ship." Even Gordon Fee, usually a very careful scholar in such matters, gives the trireme definition (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 159 n.6).

word ὑπηρέτης means simply "attendant, servant." It may most readily be illustrated in political, cultic, or military contexts, not maritime.[32]

It is not only word meanings but also grammatical usage that must be considered synchronically.[33] The middle voice is a good example. In classical Greek the middle voice carried the nuance of self-interest on the part of the grammatical subject. As summarized in the standard classical grammar,

> The middle voice shows that the action is performed with special reference to the subject.... The Direct Reflexive Middle represents the subject as acting directly *on himself. Self* is here the direct object.... The Indirect Reflexive Middle represents the subject as acting *for himself, with reference to himself,* or *with something belonging to himself. Self* is often here the indirect object.... The Causative Middle denotes that the subject has something done by another for himself.... Reciprocal Middle. — With a dual or plural subject the middle may indicate a reciprocal relation.... As contrasted with the active, the middle lays stress on the conscious activity, bodily or mental participation, of the agent.[34]

Such usage is too frequently injected into the Greek of the NT, not realizing that this distinctive use of the middle is a classical feature that has nearly disappeared in the later koine stages of the language.[35] As Moule puts it, the distinction between the active and middles voices "has become blurred by the N.T. period."[36] Insensitivity to the diachronic development can be seen

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[32] See the examples of nonbiblical usage cited in BDAG, 1035 and L&S, 1872 c.2.

[33] Other examples of such changes include the use of prepositions (e.g., εἰς encroaches the domain of ἐν—something not realized by Westcott in his commentary on John where he attempts to draw fine distinction between these two prepositions), the development of overlapping and replacement usage of comparative and superlative forms of the adjective (often "upgrading" the meaning from one form to the next higher), etc. On these and other changes, see the summaries in Black, *Linguistics,* 156–60.

[34] Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar,* rev. G. Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956), 390–92 (§§ 1713–1728) *passim.*

[35] Most middle voice verbs in the NT (about 75%) are deponent and thus have an active meaning (William Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 149; 2d ed. [2003], 152). I am aware that there are some major issues involved in discussions of the middle voice and the concept of deponency. Some have challenged not only the traditional definitions but also the view sketched here. See Carl Conrad, "New Observations on Voice in the Ancient Greek Verb," available online (both URLs accessed 8/1/03) at either:
<http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~cwconrad/docs/NewObsAncGrkVc.pdf>
or <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Docs/NewObsAncGrkVc.pdf>.
I have not yet come to a conclusion regarding Conrad's proposals. In any event, either explanation illustrates the issues discussed above even if the details may differ. One cannot assume that classical usage is identical with koine.

[36] C. F. D. Moule, A*n Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek,* 2d ed. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959), 24. NT usage itself may show this change in that Matthew sometimes changes middle forms found in Mark to active voice forms. (This statement, of course, assumes Markan priority! There are a host of other complex factors in such synoptic questions.) As possible examples, note ἐφυλαξάμην, Mk. 10:20 > ἐφύλαξα, Matt. 19:20; ἐμβαπτόμενος, Mk. 14:20 > ἐμβάψας, Matt. 26:23; and σπασάμενος, Mk. 14:47 > ἀπέσπασεν, Matt. 26:51. These examples can be found in Moule, *Idiom-Book,* 24 and in W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew,* ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), xxiii.

both in beginning grammars,[37] and in more advanced works.[38] There are a few examples of individual verbs that have retained the classical sense of the middle, but these are few in number.[39]

As one example of exegesis that has been affected (negatively) by failures in this area, consider the treatment of 1 Corinthians 13:8 as it is sometimes handled in cessationist literature.[40] It is not uncommon to hear such discussions based on the middle voice of παύσονται: tongues will cease in and of themselves. For example, MacArthur argues that,

> **Cease** is from *pauō,* which means "to stop, to come to an end." Unlike *katargeō,* this verb is here used in the Greek middle voice, which, when used of persons indicates intentional, voluntary action upon oneself. Used of inanimate objects it indicates reflexive, self-causing action. The cause comes from within; it is built in. God gave the gift of **tongues** a built-in stopping place. "That gift will stop by itself," Paul says. Like a battery, it had a limited energy supply and a limited lifespan. When its limits were reached, its activity automatically ended. Prophecy and knowledge will be stopped by something outside themselves, but the gift of tongues will stop by itself. This distinction in terms is unarguable.[41]

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[37] E.g., William Hersey Davis, *Beginner's Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: London, 1923), 37, in which he glosses the middle of his paradigm verb (λούω/λούομαι) as "I wash myself," etc. This is misleading in that λούω is one of the few verbs which does retain the classical sense in the middle voice. The student will assume that this is the *normal* use of the middle. Machen is much more careful and includes appropriate qualifications, glossing λύομαι as "I loose" with a secondary gloss in parentheses, "I am loosing for myself" (J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* [Toronto: Macmillan, 1923], 57–58. David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 79–80, has a lengthier discussion than most, but still assumes classical categories. Mounce has chosen the wiser course by initially telling the student to treat the middle as equivalent to active, but to expect greater clarification later; he then provides a full explanation of the differences between classical and koine usage in a later chapter (*Basics of Biblical Greek,* 148–49, 224–25; 2d ed. [2003], 151–52, 230–31).

[38] E.g., William MacDonald, *Greek Enchiridion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 5, who blithely states that the middle is reflexive with the subject both producing and receiving the action—with no qualifications at all. Likewise James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of America, 1988 [typeset edition]), 111–13, describe the normal classical range (without identifying it as such) as if that were normative koine usage.

[39] The most reliable guide in this area is to consult BDAG which will indicate any such peculiarities of the middle voice in particular verbs. For example, the entry for εὑρίσκω (p. 411f) reads as follows (note particularly section 3): "1. **to come upon someth. either through purposeful search or accidentally,** *find*... 2. **to discover intellectually through reflection, observation, examination, or investigation,** *find, discover...* 3. **to attain a state or condition,** *find (for oneself), obtain.* The mid. is used in this sense in Attic wr. ...; in our lit. it occurs in this sense only Hb. 9:12. As a rule our lit. uses the act. in such cases."

[40] Do not take any of my comments in this paper as challenging or denying a cessationist position. I am a cessationist. My point here (as well as later in the paper when I return to this same example) is the basis on which that position is sometimes argued. For reference, the text of 1 Cor. 13:8 reads, Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει. εἴτε δὲ προφητεῖαι, καταργηθήσονται· εἴτε γλῶσσαι, παύσονται· εἴτε γνῶσις, καταργηθήσεται (Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away—*ESV*).

[41] MacArthur, *1 Corinthians,* 359. Similar explanations may be found in Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 162, and in A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament,* 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman, 1930–33), 4:179. Charles R. Smith debates the issue at length (though without considering the diachronic/ synchronic issues) and comes to a slightly different conclusion: "they will

Such statements can even be found in some grammars. Brooks and Winbery translate this phrase, "Wherever (there are) tongues, they will *cease by themselves.*"[42] It is not necessary to engage in a lengthy exegesis of this passage.[43] The comments cited here illustrate the problems that arise when the linguistic issues are not adequately considered.

As a result of considerations such as those summarized above, the well-reasoned consensus of contemporary NT scholarship is that priority must be given to a synchronic approach to language which places little weight on the historical, developmental stages of the language (i.e., diachrony). It does not seek the "root meanings" of words, nor does it place a priority on the attempt to trace etymology or usage in classical Greek. Attention is focused on contemporary evidence as to the usage which would be familiar to a given author. The evidence of other koine texts, whether literary or nonliterary, have a qualitatively greater value than texts from earlier stages of the language.[44] An author's own use of a particular word in multiple contexts is more significant than another writer's use of the same word.[45] The exact range of the synchrony involved is relative and the use of earlier evidence is not precluded so long as it is demonstrably relevant.[46] This does not mean that there are no considerations of diachronic factors. Indeed, there must be if for no other reason than to avoid the mistakes of assuming similarity when none exists. But the earlier stages of the language or its use in different cultures or historical periods are not considered normative. The primary focus is determining how the language functions at the time of the text under consideration. Both approaches are valid and have their appropriate place, but in exegesis, and particularly in lexical semantics, emphasis should always be on synchronic study. Diachronic concerns serve, at best, a secondary role in the exegesis of the NT.

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simply *stop* or *cease* in the natural process of things" (*Tongues in Biblical Perspective,* 2d ed. [Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1973], 84). His argument still places too much weight on the verb involved.

[42] Brooks and Winbery, *Syntax,* 112, emphasis in the original.

[43] For extended discussion of this question, see Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 75–77; Myron J. Houghton, "A Re-examination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13," *BSac* 153 (1996): 348–49; Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 68–69; and Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 422–23.

[44] For example, the most appropriate background for the meaning of μορφή is not Aristotle's use of it as a technical, philosophical term for "attributes," but rather the LXX's use of the term (Judg. 8:18; Job 4:16; Isa. 44:13; Dan. 3:19). For details, see the article on κενόω posted at <http://faculty.bbc.edu/rdecker/rd_ken.htm>.

[45] For example, Paul's use of κενόω elsewhere in his writings (Rom. 4:14; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3) is of greater relevance to determining his use in Phil. 2 than is the use of other biblical writers (Gen. 24:20; 2 Chron. 24:11; Jer. 14:2; 15:9) or of the papyri (P Oxy VIII.1082 Fr. $I^{ii.5ff}$ [2d C. AD]; BGU 1.27^{7} [2–3d C. AD], for both of which see MM, 340).

[46] For example, the LXX is demonstrably relevant to the vocabulary of the NT since this formed the Bible of the early church and NT authors were intimately familiar with that corpus. Do note, however, the differing values given to LXX evidence in the preceding notes. This is partly determined by the available evidence.

An Excursus on Ἐκκλησία

In light of the preceding discussion of synchronic and diachronic methodology, I would like to suggest an illustration of how the older emphasis on a diachronic approach has influenced evangelical theology. That illustration pertains to the explanation, often repeated, of the meaning of the word ἐκκλησία. As most who read this paper will already know, ἐκκλησία is often defined as the group of people who have been called out of the world by God. This is said to be based on the etymology of the word: ἐκκλησία = ἐκ (out of) + καλέω (to call).

Now, I have no quarrel with the theology of such a definition. It is palpably true that the church does, indeed, consist of those whom God has called to himself and who are constituted as a group of fellow believers who formerly were part of the world (i.e., the mass of unredeemed humanity in rebellion against God). This can readily be established *on the clear statement of Scripture* from such passages as Acts 15:14; Rom. 8:30; and John 17:6–26. In none of these texts (or contexts), however, is the word ἐκκλησία used to express this concept. Unbelievers may be *taken* from the Gentiles (λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν, Acts 15:14), *called* to salvation (ἐκάλεσεν, Rom. 8:30), or *given* to Christ out of the world (ἐδωκάς μοι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, John 17:6), but they are never described as "called out of the world."

My objection to defining ἐκκλησία as the group of people who have been called out of the world by God is the *basis* on which this statement is offered. The *methodology* used is, in my opinion, invalid, and that is not a light matter. Although we have "gotten away with it" in this instance (because the conclusion happens to state a valid theological truth), the method by which one does exegesis and arrives at theological conclusions is vitally important. If the text determines our theology (as I think everyone who accepts the authority of Scripture must admit) rather than our theology determining our understanding of the text, then the method employed can have far-reaching implications. In some instances we may come to orthodox (i.e., biblical) conclusions, but in other instances using an invalid method may result in unorthodox (i.e., unbiblical) conclusions of greater or lesser magnitude. Method is tremendously important.

So, let's examine this particular argument and method. What are its implications? For representative statements of the diachronic approach to defining ἐκκλησία, consider these, first from an evangelical theology text.

> The word "church" is a translation of a Greek word "ekklesia" and is frequently used of any assembly or congregation of people whether gathered for religious or for political purposes. The word actually means "called out ones." In early Greece, cities were often ruled by pure democracy in which every citizen in the town would gather together to act upon matters of mutual interest. As

> they would be called out from their ordinary occupations to an assembly where they could vote, the word came to mean the result of being called out, or those who were thus assembled.[47]

From the other end of the theological spectrum, a critical scholar argues that "the etymology is both simple and significant. The citizens are the ἔκκλητοι, i.e., those who are summoned and called together by the herald. This teaches us something concerning the biblical and Christian usage, namely, that God in Christ calls men out of the world."[48] Such quotes could be multiplied.[49] It is possible that one of the major sources of these explanations is Trench's *Synonyms:*

> ἡ ἐκκλησία ... was the lawful assembly in a free Greek city of all those possessed of the rights of citizenship, for the transaction of public affairs. That they were *summoned* is expressed in the latter part of the word; that they were summoned *out of* the whole population, a select portion of it, including neither the populace, nor strangers, nor yet those who had forfeited their civic rights, this is expressed in the first. Both the *calling* (the κλῆσις, Phil. iii. 14; 2 Tim. i. 9), and the calling *out* (the ἐκλογή, Rom. xi. 7; 2 Pet. i. 10), are moments to be remembered, when the word is assumed into a higher Christian sense, for in them the chief part of its peculiar adaptation to its auguster uses lies.[50]

Most seek to draw their support (diachronically) from the practice of the city states in ancient Greece. It is often noted that a herald would summon (ἐκκαλέω) the citizens (ἔκκλητοι) from their homes to gather in a public meeting place. The resulting assembly of citizens who had been thus summoned from their homes was referred to as the ἐκκλησία.

What are we to make of this? First, ἐκκλησία *is* used to describe the legislative assembly in ancient Greece. This use is present in Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, etc.[51] Aristotle uses it to describe such legislative bodies in various times (e.g., Homeric) and cities (e.g., Sparta). In

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[47] L. S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes,* rev. J. F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 237. In a similar, though less elaborate form, "The word *ekklesia,* translated 'church'... comes from two Greek words: *ek,* 'out,' and *kaleo,* 'to call.' The two words together mean 'to call out.' It follows therefore that *ekklesia* refers to a called-out assembly or a gathering of people" (Robert Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], 227–28). A nearly identical argument is sometimes offered for the OT word קָהָל (assembly) as well. T. F. Torrance, e.g., traces the meaning and etymology of this word to קוֹל (voice) and concludes that "the OT *qahal* was the community summoned by the Divine Voice, by the Word of God" ("Israel and the Incarnation," *Judaica* 13 [1957], 1–2, as cited by Barr, *Semantics,* 119). I cannot address this OT issue in the confines of this brief paper; the student who is seriously interested in such things is encouraged to read Barr's devastating critique of Torrance's methodology on pp. 120–29.

[48] Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "καλέω, κτλ.," *TDNT* 3:513. This quote is from a section of the article discussing the use of ἐκκλησία in the Greek world. It is interesting, however, that after making such an emphatic statement here ("the etymology is ... significant"), later in the article Schmidt minimizes, if not sets aside altogether, this conclusion: "not impossible, but not probable.... We cannot indulge in arbitrary or fanciful etymologizing" (3:530).

[49] See the quotes in Appendix A, p. 18.

[50] Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament,* 9th ed. (1880; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 1–2. This may well have been a common explanation in the 19th C. since it also appears in Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics,* 176–77.

[51] See L&S, s.v. ἐκκλησία for the relevant citations.

Athens we know that at one time there was both a legislative body of citizens (ἐκκλησία) and a senate (βουλή). There were other terms that were also used for these and similar gatherings such as σύλλογος. But a complication for this approach arises in that ἐκκαλέω is *not* used to describe the summoning of these assemblies. That action is referred to with the verbs συναγείρειν, συνάγειν, συλλέγειν, ἀθροίζειν, ποεῖν, γίγνεται, etc. It is the opposite of διαλύειν, ἀναστῆσαι, ἀφιέναι, and ἀναβάλλειν (all of which mean to dissolve or adjourn an assembly). The related verb, ἐκκλησιάζω, normally means to debate or deliberate in assembly. There are a *few* references in which ἐκκλησιάζω means to convene an assembly. I have found references to only two such uses, but the only reference which is clear from the information given in L&S (and *DNTT* 1:291) refers to an assembly of *soldiers:* τοὺς αὐτοῦ στρατιώτας (Aen. Tact. 9.1).[52] The verb ἐκκλησιάζω, however, is not used in the NT. This means that from the extensive (though not exhaustive), representative lists given in the unabridged classical lexicon, *none* provide any evidence for an actual usage of the terminology that supports the claims so often made. There is no reference to or focus on a "calling out from" in connection with any of the related terms in the body of classical literature.[53]

The methodological fallacy here, even from a diachronic perspective, ought to be obvious: a semantic claim is made that has no factual support in actual usage. The only basis is the presumed etymological significance of the compound words. But how do we know that any speaker of ancient Greek ever made such an association? If there is no evidence that can be cited, then we are dealing with a "clumsy tool for determining meaning" and we should admit that the "specification of meaning on the sole basis of etymology can never be more than an educated guess."[54]

It might also be worth noting that the verb form καλέω, when prefixed with the preposition ἐν, *changes* the meaning of καλέω significantly—and in a direction that could not be predicted on the basis of the etymology.[55] That is, ἐγκαλέω means *to accuse*—scarcely related in any obvious way to calling. With an alpha privative, ἀνεγκλησία/τος means *blameless,* i.e., cannot be accused. On the other hand, ἐισκαλέω and ἐκκαλέω are synonymous (both mean *to invite*). We therefore dare not assume that the prepositional meaning is transparent; sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't.[56] In other words, there is no way to predict what, if any, affect a

[52] The other *possible* reference is D.S. 21.16 where it apparently refers to λαός.

[53] This tentative conclusion needs to be tested against the entire corpus, but I have only recently (within the last month) obtained *TLG* and have not had time to explore this issue as I am still learning to use this massive resource adequately and accurately. The initial version of the section above dealing with ἐκκλησία was written some months ago.

[54] Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 33.

[55] I'm sure someone could devise a creative etiology to explain this seeming anomaly, but would there be any textual evidence to support such a conjecture?

[56] On semantic transparency and opacity, see Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 48.

prepositional prefix will have — and it cannot be assumed on an etymological basis. Only actual usage is a reliable guide.

In this example, using a diachronic approach has done our ecclesiology an injustice. Although it has not changed the theology involved, it has defended truth on an invalid basis. This teaches our students a wrong method (which may well result in error in other areas) and also opens us to ridicule.

Minimalism vs. Maximalism

I would now like to turn to a somewhat broader methodological issue and inquire as to the goal of our use of the biblical languages. Again, my focus is primarily on Greek and the NT, but the same issues are relevant to Hebrew, Aramaic, and the OT as well.

The terms *minimalism* and *maximalism* refer to divergent approaches to or philosophies of the role of the biblical languages and particularly to the significance of various elements of the language.[57] Minimalism[58] places the least significance on the individual "pieces" of a language (tense, case, mood, etc.) and the greatest value on contextual factors.[59] This does not mean that the individual pieces carry no semantic value. They do. Without such, the context would also be semantically vacuous (0 + 0 + 0 is still 0). It is a matter of relative significance. By contrast, a maximal approach finds exegetical significance in isolated grammatical elements in a text. The use of a particular tense, e.g., is viewed as significant—almost atomistically (though that is perhaps slightly overstated).

How often is great significance found in an aorist tense? The aorist may seem "esoteric" and therefore significant to an English speaker since there is no aorist form in English. Yet the aorist is the default form in Greek, used when the speaker/writer does not want to specify any particular nuance as to the nature of the situation. It forms the default storyline in narrative and serves to set forth basic propositions in exposition. The use of any other tense is of greater exegetical significance.[60]

Maximalism is the "golden nuggets" approach to Greek exemplified in much popular discussion, whether of printed or homiletical genre.[61] The motivation for this approach may be

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[57] This is, of course, relevant to any language, not just Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, but the issue only comes to the surface when an exegetical study of a written document is in view. This is seldom of concern in, say, English—unless a legal matter is involved, or the self-justifying morality of certain officials is in question (e.g., the meaning of *is*).

[58] Do not confuse this terminology with similar terms from the realm of OT studies which cast doubt on the historicity of the text! This is a totally different and totally unrelated use of the term.

[59] In some ways I would prefer to refer to this perspective as "contextual maximalism" since some view any "minimalistic" terminology in a negative light. But the terminology is in place, so I will have to live with it.

[60] See the discussion of marked and unmarked forms in the second part of the paper.

[61] The published works of Wuest and Lenski are both examples of a maximal approach.

sincere, but it may reflect an ignorance of language and an unsupportable view of the way language works.

As Silva has well said,

> The conviction that the Scriptures have a divine origin may predispose us to look for as much meaning as we can find. We must remind ourselves, therefore, that … God's revelation has come to us in *human* language.... In short, the first point to keep in mind when evaluating the Greek verbal system is that we should not overstate its intrinsic value.[62]

Exegesis is best served by a minimalist approach to language in which the least significance is attributed to the individual elements and greater weight is placed on the context. The minimalist approach may not yield large quantities of exegetical nuggets, but this approach to grammar is more likely to encourage and enable responsible exegesis.[63] "We can feel confident that no reasonable writer would seek to express a major point by leaning on a subtle grammatical distinction—especially if it is a point not otherwise clear from the whole context (and if it *is* clear from the context, then the grammatical subtlety plays at best a secondary role in exegesis)."[64]

Not only that, but we must remember that form and function do not have a one-to-one relationship. Any given form may perform a variety of functions in a language and many functions can often be performed by multiple forms. For example, a genitive form may function in any given context to indicate relationship, content, source, value, means, or agency.[65] Or consider the article. It may function as a pronoun or as a substantive, or with a noun it can function anaphorically, kataphorically, or monadically.[66] From the reverse perspective, the function of command can be indicated by the imperative, participle, infinitive, or future indicative; a closely related function can also be indicated with a hortatory subjunctive. This is relevant to the question of maximalism in that many maximalists (though perhaps not all) tend to lock in to a particular (often artificial) meaning of some feature of the language and

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[62] Moisés Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 69.

[63] Similar concerns have been voiced by Moisés Silva on a number of occasions: *Explorations in Exegetical Method,* 68–79; *Biblical Words and Their Meanings,* 153–58; *God, Language and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), esp. 11–16, 118, 144, though the whole is relevant; "Language and Style of the Gospels," in *The Gospels Today,* ed. J. Skilton, 27–37 (Philadelphia: Skilton House, 1990), 35–36; and *Philippians,* WEC (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 13. Also relevant to this issue are E. Nida, "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 91 (1972): 74, 86; M. Joos, "Semantic Axiom Number One," *Language* 48 (1972): 257; and Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 82. Although not formulated in quite such terms, this also appears to be the burden of a good part of Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies,* particularly chapter 2, "Grammatical Fallacies," 65–86.

[64] Silva, *God, Language and Scripture,* 115.

[65] This is only a partial list. Though multiplication of categories is not necessarily helpful, Wallace classifies more than thirty genitive functions (*Greek Grammar,* 72–136). Even though this is probably overdone, it still makes the point effectively that a single form can function in a variety of ways.

[66] Again, this is only a partial list. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* 206–90.

then read that into every occurrence.[67] They never consider that the same form can have multiple functions or inquire as to the significance *of the context* in determining which particular function might be operative.

Let me suggest two examples of this principle. Illustrated here are instances in which individual grammatical elements become determinative for the exegesis of a text and in which artificial meanings are assumed for such elements without adequate contextual sensitivity. The first example has already been considered in a different context. The argument for the cessation of tongues that is based on the middle voice of the verb παύω (1 Cor. 13:8) is a maximalist argument. The validity of the argument hinges on one grammatical "piece"—the voice of the verb—and an artificial definition of the meaning of that piece. Apart from this "voiced" argument, there is no contextual evidence to support the cessationist conclusion drawn from the verb.[68] It is unrealistic to think that this is a normal use of language. Grammatical subtleties are not the basis of expository discourse.

As a second example, consider the arguments offered by Kenneth Wuest—the King of Maximalism. After citing John 21:1–2, Wuest writes the following paragraph:

> After setting the scene, John plunges at once to the heart of the matter with Peter's announcement to his fellow-disciples, "I go a fishing" (A. V.). From the words of the translation, one would gather that Peter's intention was merely to throw a net into the sea for a brief fling at fishing until such time as Jesus would appear as He promised to do. But when we examine the Greek text, we find something very serious. The words, "I go" are the translation of *hupagō,* which is used to denote the final departure of one who ceases to be another's companion or attendant. This was Peter's formal announcement after the consultation which the disciples had, presumably in his home, to the effect that he was abandoning his preaching commission received from the Lord Jesus, breaking his relations with Him so far as any future service was concerned. The words "a fishing" are the translation of the present infinitive of the verb *halieuō.* The action is durative, progressive, action going on constantly. The tense refers to the habitual action of fishing. This also includes the fact of the character of the person performing the action, namely, that he is a fisherman by trade. Thus, by using this word, John reports Peter as announcing the fact that he is going back to his fishing business permanently. This drastic decision on the part of Peter, is hard to believe except for the following considerations: First, the above translation and interpretation is based upon a rigid adherence to the rules of Greek grammar and the exact meaning of the Greek words involved. Second, when we remember that this decision was made by such a one as the unpredictable, vacillating, impetuous Peter, one can understand the possibility of such a thing. Third, the man who made this decision was the one who said to Jesus, "Be it far from thee Lord; this shall not be unto

[67] Actually most are rather selective in their application of this habit in that they ignore instances in which they cannot make it fit. Maximalists tend not to be consistent in their interpretations. In one passage "the present tense means x," or "[this word] means x," but the same word or tense in the next verse turns out to mean "y"—or to be ignored altogether. In either case, blanket statements are made which only "work" in certain situations.

[68] See n. 40. Even if traditional/classical usage of the middle voice were assumed, or if Conrad's suggestions (see n. 35) were adopted, hinging one's interpretation of the passage on the voice of this one verb would still be a maximalist argument.

> thee," referring to the Cross. This was the man who denied that he knew Jesus, and called down a divine curse upon himself, and took an oath upon the veracity of his statement, to the effect that he did not know the Lord. The disciple who was such an easy tool of Satan in these two occurrences, could also easily be used of him in this post-resurrection crisis which faced our Lord.[69]

One hardly knows where to begin with such "exegesis"! Let me point out several of the methodological issues. First, ὑπάγω is over-defined; it is said to mean "the final departure of one who ceases to be another's companion or attendant."[70] But ὑπάγω means simply "to be on the move."[71] Based on the word itself there is no basis for suggesting that this is a final move, nor is there any implication of cessation from anything. The only contextual indicator is the adjacent infinitive (ἁλιεύειν) which specifies the purpose of Peter's "move." There is no reasonable basis anywhere in the text to make this Peter's formal announcement of a permanent abandonment of his commission. If Wuest were consistent in his definition of this word, then he would encounter a serious problem elsewhere in John. For instance, in John 14:3–4 Jesus promises καὶ ἐὰν πορευθῶ καὶ ἑτοιμάσω τόπον ὑμῖν, πάλιν ἔρχομαι καὶ παραλήμψομαι ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἐμαυτόν, ἵνα ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε. [4]καὶ ὅπου [ἐγὼ] ὑπάγω οἴδατε τὴν ὁδόν (And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. [4]And you know the way to where I am going"—ESV). Here John not only uses ὑπάγω synonymously with πορεύομαι, but he explicitly quotes Jesus indicating both a departure *and a return*—not exactly a "final departure"![72]

Wuest also places a great deal of exegetical weight on the fact that the infinitive ἁλιεύειν is a present infinitive. Here he not only confuses aspect and *Aktionsart,* but he presses it into a description of Peter's character: he is (going to become) a fisherman by trade, and that permanently.[73] This is certainly indefensible based on the tense alone. There are many instances of present tense verbs—especially infinitives—that describe only short term situations.[74] There may be a few which do refer to a permanent condition (ἔχειν, John 5:26 is one example), but all these are based on evidence *other than* the present tense.[75]

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[69] Kenneth Wuest, *Great Truths to Live by from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 115–16.

[70] Notice also that Wuest claims that his interpretation is based on "the exact meaning of the Greek words involved."

[71] BDAG, 1028.

[72] A similar statement occurs in John 14:28, Ὑπάγω καὶ ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς. Other passages that prove intractable to Wuest's definition include Matt. 5:24; 19:21; 20:4; Mark 6:38; 10:21; 11:2; Luke 19:30; and John 4:16.

[73] In this case we have nothing with which to compare Peter's usage—ἁλιεύειν only occurs one time in the NT. It is also infrequent in Greek literature (the same form occurs only twice in all previous Greek literature, and the string ἁλιευ is listed only about 60 times in *TLG* prior to the first century).

[74] A casual browsing of present infinitives in John suggests these instances: διέρχεσθαι, 4:4; ἐργάζεται, 9:4 *bis;* νίπτειν, ἐκμάσσειν, 13:5; βαστάζειν, 16:12; and μένειν, 21:22. And some even describe unreal, intentional situations which are never realized (e.g., ἔρχεσθαι καὶ ἁρπάζειν, 6:15; there are numerous examples of this use in John).

[75] For further comment on this example, see Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 117.

This is a classic case of exegetical maximalism. In this case it is clearly an example of over-exegeting and even of eisegesis. Language, biblical or otherwise, cannot be treated in this fashion. Yet it has become endemic in our pulpits and perhaps even in some of our classrooms.[76] It is done with good intentions: this is an inspired text and we want to glean all the meaning from it. Some might even object that our acceptance of the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture *requires* us to handle the text in this manner. Grammatical minimalism in no way denies these doctrines. What it does insist is that we are not justified thereby in attributing all *possible* meanings to the text. Finding more meaning in the text that the aAuthor[77] intended is just as culpable as missing some of the intended meaning—perhaps more so since by doing so the interpreter is attributing to God's text what God never intended. If an exegete neglects some item in the text, that gap is not likely to be serious in that it will likely be found elsewhere in the text where it is more obvious or supplied by someone else. But there are no such safeguards in the case of additions to the text's meaning.

That Scripture is written in an ancient setting using languages that appear esoteric or alien to our own experience tends to incline us toward finding "golden nuggets" in the text. Yet "the richness and divine origin of the biblical *message* are not compromised by the naturalness and simplicity of the *form* in which God has chosen to communicate to us."[78] The sort of exegesis modeled by Wuest results in the removal of the text from the hands of the average Christian who has no means to finding this hidden meaning. It too often results in becoming an "authority club" in the hands of the preacher. The Christian can't argue with what is claimed to be the pronouncement of the original text. Despite the importance of the biblical languages and the value of detailed linguistic analysis of the text, we dare not deprive the layman of confidence in the Word of God. The use of several reliable English (or Spanish, etc.) translations enables careful readers to understand not only the main message (which would be clear in almost any legitimate translation), but most of the message that God intends them to find.[79] We dare not by our technical study undermine the confidence of God's people. Our work

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[76] The classic parody of such exegetical gymnastics in Silva's *God, Language and Scripture,* 11–13, is well worth reading and pondering. It hits far closer to home in far more of our pulpits than we often care to admit.

[77] The spelling *aAuthor* is my shorthand for "human and divine authors."

[78] Silva, *God, Language and Scripture,* 13–14.

[79] Not everything can be found in translations. The biblical languages are necessary. Simply because languages differ in their structure there are elements of the original text that are lost when translating into, say, English. (There is also something added in every translation.) As a very simple example, English does not distinguish between singular and plural in the second person pronoun, yet Greek does. Apart from reading the Greek text there is no way to tell whether "you" is singular or plural. Or take the tenses as another example. Apart from a very stilted translation, several different Greek tenses will often be represented best in English in the same fashion. Aorist, perfect, and present forms may all, in some contexts, be best translated as simple present tense forms in English. Differences between Greek and English such as those illustrated here do not result in a total loss of meaning in English. The context is usually clear as to singular or plural—and the difference is not always exe-

with linguistic technicalities may help refine the message and surely enables us to grasp it more easily, but such matters are for the study, not for the pulpit. There we must serve in an appetizing, appealing way the meal that we have so carefully prepared—in a way that enables the hearers not only to understand God's message, but to understand *how* we arrived at that meaning. Yes, the biblical languages are the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit rests,[80] but they are not that sword. The sword is the message of God's Word that the Spirit wields to accomplish his work in the hearts of his people.

Appendix A: ἐκκλησία

The following citations are intended to illustrate the widespread etymological fallacy regarding the meaning of ἐκκλησία discussed in the first part of the paper. I have included both fallacious instances and some that employ legitimate semantic methodology. The listings here are representative, not exhaustive. I simply began running down my three shelves of systematic theologies. Most (but not all) are evangelical or conservative, but only because my library contains a higher proportion of such volumes. This might be called, "the hall of shame and fame."

Negative Examples

- "The English word 'Church' is the translation of the Greek word 'ecclesia' which means 'called out.' It was used of an assembly or congregation that might be called out for various purposes. The significance of this term as used in the New Testament is twofold. It refers to those who are called out from among the nations as a people for his name who constitute the Church, the Body of Christ. In this sense it is an organism. It also refers to those who are called out of any given community to carry out the principles and precepts of Christ found in the New Testament, as a body of Christians. In this sense it is an organization" (Emory Bancroft, *Elemental Theology* [3d ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960], 237; 4th ed., rev. Ronald Mayers [1970], 305).
- "The word 'ekklesia' is derived from '*ek,*' out, and '*kaleo,*' to call, denoting in good Greek usage the assembly of citizens when *called out* from their homes to gathering places for the discussion of public business" (Emory Bancroft, *Christian Theology Theology* [2d ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961], 260).
- "The New Testament word 'church' (Gk. *ekklesia,* a 'called out' assembly) has both secular and sacred meanings, depending upon its context" (Floyd Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* [Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984], 285).

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getically significant anyway. And differentiating the various tenses from an English translation is not always desirable since most who attempt to do so will not understand the significance of the tense difference. If the translator has been sensitive to the context and accurately represented the meaning, the English reader will understand God's message regardless of the correlation of tenses between the two languages. On the other hand, it is impossible to study the discourse function of verbal aspect from a translation. For that the original text is essential.

[80] The allusion to the sheath and sword is to the words of Martin Luther; they may be read in their context at <http://faculty.bbc.edu/rdecker/luther.htm>.

- "The English word *church* also translates the Greek word *ekklesia,* which is derived from *ek,* meaning 'out of,' and *kaleo,* which means 'to call,' hence, the church is 'a called out group' (Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1989], 347).
- "*Ekklesia* is derived from the Greek *ek* ('out of') and *kaleo* ('called'), hence, 'called out of.' ... The areas from which the word was drawn point out the shades of meanings impregnated into it. Whether or not the primitive church was fully aware of this full-orbed meaning when it first used *ekklesia* may be debatable; nevertheless, as the church expanded its life in the world, the term *ekklesia* grew with it because of its inherent potential of meaning" (David L. Smith, "Ecclesiology: The Church, God's Redeemed People," in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology,* ed. Charles Carter, 2:575–627 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 2:576–77).
- "'Ecclesia,' from two Greek words meaning 'to call out from' ... In keeping with this idea the saints are said to be the 'called-out' ones" (William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* [3d ed., Chicago: Moody Press, 1949], 182).
- "The word 'church' in the English Bible is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia,* which is derived from *ek,* out of, and *kaleo,* I call.... In the political life of the Greek city-states (Athens, Sparta, etc.), the Greeks used the word *ekklesia* to refer to the regular assembly of all free citizens, who had been called out from the inhabitants of the area by a herald" (Alva G. Huffer, *Systematic Theology* [Oregon, IL: National Bible Institution, 1960], 438 [Church of God]).
- "The word church, as we find it in the New Testament, is mostly the rendering of the Greek word ἐκκλησία. This word is composed of ἐκ, from or out of, and καλεῖν, to summon or call, with the idea of convocation for the consideration or transaction of some public business. The primary idea is that of an orderly assembly ... lawfully convened for public business.... In like manner, Christian are called into churchly association (John Miley, *Systematic Theology,* 2 vols. [New York: Hunt & Easton, 1894], 2:385). [The inclusion of Miley in the "negative" section might be debated since he does not expound the usual etymological argument. He does cite the etymology, however, which implies that he views it as relevant. His argument is less objectionable than most listed in this section.]
- "The Greek word *ekklēsia* was the name of the classical Greek assembly that gathered together for deliberative purposes" (Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 427). Although Moody does not pursue the etymological line, his statement assumes that the classical Greek assembly is appropriate background for explaining the NT use of ἐκκλησία.
- "In itself this term [ἐκκλησία] means simply a body of called-out people, as an assembly of citizens in a self-governing state; but the New Testament has filled it with a spiritual content, so that it means a people called out from the world and from sinful things.... It is interesting to note that the English word 'church' comes from the Greek word *kuriakos,* which means 'belonging to the Lord.' ... We might, therefore, give as a secondary definition of the term 'church' the following: a group of people called out from the world and belonging to the Lord" (H. C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology,* rev. V. Doerksen [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 307 [orig. ed., p. 407 the same]). Here we have not only the implied etymological argument, but also a compounded error in defining one Greek word on the basis of the etymology of an English word derived from a different Greek word!
- "That the word *ecclesia* is Greek derived from *ekkalein* ('calling out') ... is so well know as to need no proof.... It designates both a separation by the force of the preposition *ek* and a collection and congregation from the emphasis of the verb *kaleō,* so that it is a society of men called out of some place or state and congregated into an assembly. The Holy Spirit transferred this ... to a sacred use to signify the people of God by way of excellence... to wit, an assembly of men called out of the mass of the human race by the preaching of the gospel to

constitute a society of believers; or the mystical body of Christ, into which no one is received unless called" (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* transl. G. Giger, ed. J. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. [orig. Latin ed., 1679–85; Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992–97], 3:6).

- *"Ekklesia* is composed of *ek,* from, or out of, and *kaleo,* to call—called out from. It denoted a company, or assembly of persons, called out, selected, chosen and separated from a larger company, a more general concourse of people" (Edward Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* [1894; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970], 21).

Positive Examples

- "The preposition *ek* in *ekklesia* (*ekkaleo*) is often interpreted to mean 'out from among the common mass of the people,' and to indicate in connection with the Scriptural use of *ekklesia,* that the Church consists of the elect, called out of the world of humanity. This interpretation is rather doubtful, however, for the preposition originally simply denoted that the Greek citizens were called out of their homes. Now it would not have been unnatural if that entirely Scriptural idea had been put into the word in God's revelation. But, as a matter of fact, we have no proof that this was actually done. The compound verb *ekkalew* is never so used, and the word *ekklesia* never occurs in a context which suggests the presence of that particular thought in the mind of the writer" (L. Berhkof, *Systematic Theology* [4th ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941], 556). [**Note** the semantic and theological method evident in Berkhof's statement; this is the correct approach—even if he does assume that there was some significance to the prefixed preposition in classical Greek, he does not make this theologically determinative since there is no contextual evidence to support it.]
- "The word translated 'church' in the New Testament and in the Septuagint is *ekklesia.* Whereas this noun is related to the verb *ekkaleo* which means 'to call out,' its biblical and ecclesiastical usage simply indicates an assembly or a body of people" (J. Oliver Buswell, *Systematic Theology,* 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962–63], 2:216).
- Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–85], 3:1030–34; although he notes that the word was used in classical Greek, he never predicates the meaning of the word on its etymology. A good discussion.
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 853–54, esp. n.3.
- Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987–94], 3:241–304. This text manages to provide an extensive, helpful discussion of the church without even mentioning the etymology of the word ἐκκλησία.
- Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 805–36, never employs the etymological argument, instead showing the connections with the OT קָהָל as mediated through the LXX. Although part of this is predicated on his covenant theology advocacy of "the unity of the covenant of grace and the oneness of the people of God in all ages" (805), it also demonstrates appropriate methodology.
- "The Greek word, *ekklesia,* meant an assembly and was used in a political, not a religious sense. It did not refer to the people but to the meeting.... When the Greek word is used in the New Testament, it takes on much richer and fuller aspects to that basic secular meaning. For example, the people themselves, whether assembled or not, are the *ekklesia.* Nevertheless, the word as used in the New Testament still retains the basic meaning of an assembly, and does not take on a supposed theological meaning (based on the breakup of the word into its two parts, 'call' and 'out of') of a 'called out' people. If the word was going to be translated on the basis of etymology, then it should be translated 'called together,' not 'called out'" (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* [Wheaton: Victor, 1986], 393–94).

- "In the original use of the word ἐκκλησία, as a popular assembly, there was doubtless an allusion to the derivation from ἐκ and καλέω, to call out by herald. Some have held that the N.T. term contains an allusion to the fact that the members of Christ's church are called, chosen, elected by God. This, however, is more than doubtful. In common use, the term has lost it etymological meaning, and signified merely an assembly, however, gathered or summoned" (A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* [8th ed., Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1907], 891).
- "The word 'Ecclesia,' rendered 'Church,' is found in the New Testament 114 times, and means an 'Assembly,' people 'called.' Hort [*The Christian Ecclesia,* 5] says that we cannot press the ἐκ to imply 'called out' of a larger body" (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology* [London: Vine Books, 1978], 266).
- Earl Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Portland: Western Baptist Press, 1972), 110–68; (reprint, Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 115–86. (There is also a Moody Press edition, 1978, under the title *What the Church Is All About;* I suspect the pagination is the same as the more recent Schoettle reprint under the original name.)
  Radmacher discusses the etymology of the word in some detail, but concludes that this is not determinative and that we must base our definition on synchronic data (though he does not use that term).
- Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 11–18, follows the same approach as Radmacher.
- Other theologies that do not depend on etymological treatments of ἐκκλησία include:
  Henry G. Weston, *Constitution and Polity of the New Testament Church* (Am. Bapt. Pub. Soc., 1895, bound/published with Eliah H. Johnson's *An Outline of Systematic Theology*).
  Edward Litton, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology,* ed. Philip Hughes (London: James Clarke, 1960; orig. ed. 1882–92 [Anglican])
  Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics,* transl. D. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981–83), 2:530–31.
  Paul R. Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church* (Des Plaines, IL: RBP, 1968).

Abbreviations

BDAG	Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
L&S	Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
TLG	*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*
ESV	*English Standard Version*
MM	Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*
DNTT	*Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* ed. Colin Brown
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. G. Kittel