

Commonalities between research methods for consumer science and biblical scholarship

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Abstract. *This article focuses on the consumption/interpretation of the Bible, which is viewed as a complex, qualitative databank, requiring rigorous methodological tools to attempt the hermeneutical interpretive task. A positivist philosophical approach to Bible study is taken, posing questions like ‘What did the original writer intend the audience to understand?’ as a precursor to the question ‘How do we impart that message today?’. Biblical scholarship is extremely sophisticated, and this article delves into many layers of techniques and rigorous analysis, including word studies, studies of phrases and paragraph structures, and sociological hypotheses about political agendas. It draws on critical textual, historical, and narrative schools of thought in biblical research. These different methods are presented both as an end in themselves (as tools of literary analysis) and also as means to study the content of the sacred as transcendent experiences of extraordinary consumption in consumer research.*
Key Words ● content analysis ● factor analysis ● multiple informants ● qualitative

This article explores a logical positivist approach to the textual analysis of qualitative data. The focal text is the Bible, which, while a perennial bestseller, is also an unused data source in consumer research. The technical focus is on the logic and methodology of the research, but the application to biblical texts is intentional, to simultaneously prompt more research on the consumption of sacredness. In the section that follows, I briefly make the case that the sacred is under-studied in consumer behavior. I then defend the philosophical approach chosen before proceeding to the methods themselves.

The study of the sacred

Consumer behavior researchers purport to study both the 'sacred' and the 'profane.' Belk et al. (1989) examine 'the sacred inherent in consumer behavior,' described as 'highly charged encounters suffused with meaning' (p. 1). They present several means by which an object may become sacralized and meaning imbued, e.g. by the richer associations made to family or friends when giving the object as a gift, by receiving the object through inheritance, or by collecting sets of said objects.

One key element to the sacralization in consumer behavior identified by these scholars is a transcendence beyond the ordinary; a consumption experience or object of consumption that is 'wholly different' (p. 6). There may be ritual in the consumption that, while not connected to any formal 'religion' indicates the object or its consumption is 'revered, feared, and treated with the utmost respect' (p. 2).

A second key element to the sacred in consumer behavior is referred to as 'communitas' (p. 7). By sharing in the rituals of the consumption experience, the participants are bonded into a social collective (even if ephemeral) community.

Belk et al. (1989) suggest additional elements to sacralization (e.g. sacrifice, commitment, myth, mystery); however, the two elements of specialness (or transcendence) and the community of participants may be primary, given that they have been fairly widely replicated. For example, in Celsi et al. (1993) and Arnould and Price (1993), reporting on the experiential consumptions of skydiving and river rafting, respectively, both teams of researchers reported on the common, central notions of transcendence and communitas, as well as other elements key to their particular settings.

In this paper, I would like to further distinguish the 's'acred (i.e. these extraordinary experiences) from the 'S'acred (more transcendent still). To put this newer stream of research into perspective, the 'S'acred may be defined as a subset or a narrower instantiation of the 's'acred, specifically involving an individual's experience with religion, spirituality, worship, and God.

While we purport to occasionally study the 's'acred, we (consumer behavior researchers) have rarely documented the 'S'acred, and in truth, we spend far more time with the profane or mundane. Of the articles published during the last five years, the *Journal of Marketing* carried 0 for 175 and the *Journal of Marketing Research* 0 for 207 articles on the sacred or Sacred (though there were a half-dozen on pro-social behaviors). During the same period, the *Journal of Consumer Research* contained 14 for 152 articles in which the authors purported to study the 's'acred, or at least the experiential (e.g. topics including myths, materialism, charity, morality, and gift-giving). Thus, *JCR* approaches 10 percent of its articles on the 's'acred, but once again, there was a near lack of representation of the 'S'acred.

One article that approaches the narrower focus of the 'S'acred may be O'Guinn and Belk (1989). O'Guinn and Belk conducted interviews at the Heritage Village PTL park during a Fourth of July weekend. They observed an 'explicit synthesis of



worship and shopping,' or a 'merger of religion and consumption' (p. 227), noting themes of the sacredness of the *place, time* (i.e. marked by holi-days if not quite liturgical holy-days), and *journey* (i.e. the pilgrimage tenet central to many religions). In addition, O'Guinn and Belk also observed the *communitas*, marked by in-group believer cohesiveness, consistent with the 's'acred papers cited earlier.

O'Guinn and Belk (1989), while being unabashedly about an element of religion, is still largely commercial in focus. No research has been conducted on the 'S'acred of the kind presented in this paper. I would like to see us occasionally 'entertain angels' and study the 'S'acred on this level as sublime, exquisite, and mystical. Recall Belk et al. (1989: 6) describing transcendence in the 's'acred as 'wholly different.' Definitions (and ancient translations) of the word 'holy' include both the aspect of being (w)ho(l)ly different or set apart from the profane, but also the connection with God or the divine (e.g. Achtemeier, 1996: 431). Thus the motivation for applying the techniques in this paper to biblical texts in particular is simple: the 'S'acred is under-studied, and this paper is an attempt to begin a tradition.

Why the Bible?

This paper focuses on the Bible (of the Christian tradition: both the Old and New Testaments) as one of the sources through which people come to know God (e.g. holy scriptures or personal revelation or religious tradition).¹ The Bible has always been *the* best-selling book, capturing a large global market: the entire Bible has been translated into 349 languages, the New Testament into 841, and at least one book of the Bible into 2123 languages (Metzger, 1994). The Bible is an important element of many people's religious and spiritual lives, and even the atheist or agnostic, or the one who holds to religious beliefs outside the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic traditions (those that derive most closely from this body of scripture) surely would acknowledge (perhaps even resent) the impact of this book on civilizations, cultures, and lives. Thus the Bible is a product whose consumption is worth studying.

The consumption of the Bible might be studied from different vantage points, e.g. that of a minister composing a sermon, or of a lay-person reading the Bible and a companion commentary. The minister preparing a sermon would read the scriptural text and consult commentaries and other sermon-preparatory resources. Ideally a sermon is based on a pericope excised from scripture and made relevant in application to today's world, e.g. regarding ethics and morality, justice, or inspiration. But this seemingly simple mapping, from the original text to a contemporary application, requires numerous levels of hermeneutics and interpretation. The minister must trust that the best archaeological research has made available the most ancient (and therefore least tampered with) Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, or Greek writings. Those ancient writings need to have been translated, and while several of the ancient languages have modern-day counter-

parts, shifts in meanings of words and phrases and expressions are common, which make the original message less tractable. The minister who then consults contemporary commentaries also needs to be concerned with the political leanings of the writer or publisher. It may seem like an easy job (prepping one 1-hour lecture a week), but there are many challenges, and the risks are greater (soul-, not brand-management).

Turning our attention to the vantage point of the technically untrained believer reading a study Bible (i.e. published with copious footnotes and references), these Bible-consumers must trust on an even greater scale that the experts have done their jobs in presenting the most realistic translations, or in the case of the commentaries, interpretations, possible. This consumption requires trust that the process has been step-wise optimized.

In this paper, I look at those steps, and their informing social science disciplines, in greater detail, to uncover the elements that enter into a 'final product' like a study Bible or a Bible commentary, which are the least technical, most accessible resources for the average (untrained) spiritual seeker looking to consume the Bible. I will consider issues regarding the translations of words and phrases from the ancient biblical languages to today's languages, the possible political agenda framed in some interpretations, and more generally I will examine the kinds of tools that biblical scholars implement in their attempts to offer the finest product for the common user's consumption. Biblical interpretation requires sophisticated scholarship; to do it well requires rigorous methods and analytical techniques.

The data are qualitative

The first thing we note is that the 'data' with which one works in biblical interpretation and hermeneutics are qualitative, e.g. biblical texts. Hence the tools one uses to study these data are textual in their foci: philosophy, theory, and methodology.

That the data are qualitative lends a point of commonality to some streams of research in consumer behavior. Consumer behavior scholars conduct research on consumers' behaviors as captured in 'symbols' (e.g. Stern, 1998), either numbers assigned to depict quantities of attributes (e.g. rating scale measures), or words to depict their qualities (e.g. consumers' verbatim or the researchers' theoretical summaries). The study of qualitative symbols in the field of consumer behavior has drawn on disciplines that make use of literary analyses, where the primary data point is the word. Biblical scholarship is an important literary tradition from which consumer behavior theories have borrowed and from which more is available to be lent (see Arnold and Fischer, 1994 on the history and adoption into consumer behavior of hermeneutics, e.g. p. 56).

Ways of interpreting the Bible: postmodernism vs. more traditional 'logical positivism'

Like consumer research, biblical scholarship has traditionally been dominated by logical positivism but has more recently also considered postmodern perspectives. The philosophical orientation of the researcher is theoretically independent of the content of his or her study, but in our field, there seems to be a recent confounding in that survey- or experimental-based consumer behavior studies are conducted and reported via a positivist tradition, and postmodernism is usually associated more with qualitative studies. Take as an example the important task of understanding a consumer's interpretation of an advertisement. Researchers working within the cognitive psychological paradigm tend to study constructs like the encoding and retrieval of consumers' exposures to ads, and changes in preferences and behavioral intentions as a function of benefits connoted by the ads. Usually the philosophy of science underlying this paradigm is one that draws on classic (positivist) communication models (or an authorial view: cf. Stern, 1989), which posit an 'intended meaning,' a truth, to be consumed by the viewer, and if a viewer's interpretation differs from the intended message, the viewer is thought not to have comprehended the message, or the advertisement is evaluated as a poor execution of that message.

This positivist perspective is not limited to experimental data; qualitative data may be approached using this philosophy of science as well, but as just noted, generally qualitative researchers have been more extensively exploring the nature of postmodern philosophies. And in the stream of research that is qualitative and more postmodern in flavor (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Sherry, 1991),² the perspective that a single true message was intended by the advertising creators is rarely embraced. Rather, the readers' diverse interpretations are deemed as roughly equally valid because the making of meaning is considered to be an interactive process between the text and the consumer (i.e. reader-response, cf. Stern, 1989). The consumers' personal experiences contribute a response to Stern's (1988) question, 'How does an ad mean?' (i.e. how does an ad come to have meaning, or how does a consumer begin to interpret an ad?). Mick and Buhl (1992) describe the interplay between the consumer and advertisement, or as Thompson et al. (1994) call it, the hermeneutical circle between consumers and a firm's marketing communications.³

The positivist vs. postmodern distinction (e.g. in understanding a consumer's interpretation of an advertisement) has also been labeled 'objective' vs. 'subjective' (Mick, 1992); or modern vs. postmodern; or, imprecisely, positivist vs. interpretive. Researchers whose interests focus on the subjective comprehension of a message generally hold to the reader-response vantage, 'that the most important meanings are those emanating from the individual recipient within a specific processing context, irrespective of whether those meanings were intended by the source or, in some sense, contained in the message' (Mick, 1992: 412). The subjective comprehension of a message is conceptualized as multilayered or

polyvocal (Sherry, 1991), from the literal, to a more abstract level in which broader benefits are inferred, to eventually the addition of personal experiential associations (Mick, 1992; Scott, 1994).

Among biblical interpretation academics there is indeed a thriving school of postmodern thought (including feminist, liberation, and African theologies: see Boff and Boff, 1996; Fiorenza, 1994; Johnson, 1996) and it too values the affirmation of diverse interpretations and the complexities of multilayered messages. Whether one consumes the Bible as objective or subjective depends in part on one's theology and in part on the consumer's needs of the text being consumed. For example, if the Bible is used primarily as a source of inspiration, then diverse interpretations for devotional or pastoral use would be valued. On the other hand, if the reader/consumer believes that the Bible is the Word of God, serving many functions including offering normative lessons, the consumer might seek knowledge from scripture, trying to ascertain God's desires or intended meaning. This view is more positivist, trying to determine the proper interpretation rather than allowing for multiple interpretations. The tension between the interpretation of the Bible as depicting God's intended meaning vs. readers' consumption of the applicability of meaning for their own lives has been played out from time immemorial (cf. the adage, 'In the beginning, God made man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the favor ever since').

Given that I have already characterized the Bible as qualitative data, one might expect that this paper would take a postmodern philosophical stance from which to engage in the literary analysis. However, I will be proceeding with an orientation from positivism for several reasons. First, much of the use of postmodern biblical interpretation is more frequently and appropriately applicable for personal (devotional or pastoral) use. That is, there appears to be greater tolerance in letting people discover whatever meanings they wish, as long as those meanings give them comfort and hope.

Second, the postmodern perspective is not interested in evaluating some points of view as being more 'correct' than others. Thus, there would be no point in my illustrating the biblical techniques that scholars have used over the centuries to try to discover, 'What did St. Paul really mean?', for example. Using a postmodern approach, such as reader-response, 'no "right" reading [would be] accepted as definitive' (Stern, 1989: 325). There is some tension; critics charge that if deconstructionism allows for infinite valid meanings, then ultimately there is meaninglessness (Stern, 1989: 326). Furthermore, a subjective interpretation of text is recognized as opening it to multiple possible meanings, yet ironically there seems to be a positivist influence when researchers say that 'not all interpretations are equally adequate' in describing respondents' perspectives (Arnold and Fischer, 1994: 59).

Finally, while postmodernism is popular among some biblical scholars today, it is nevertheless true that a positivist perspective has dominated biblical scholarship. Thus it would simply be more representative of the field of biblical scholarship to present positivist-based approaches to the consumption of scriptural texts.

Accordingly, this paper focuses on positivist biblical scholarship questions and



techniques. I will examine the approaches of the biblical scholars who seek to understand what the ancient writings were intended to have meant, first for the audience of that day, and second, for the audience of today.

The positivist approach to Bible study

The positivist perspective to the hermeneutical task of biblical interpretation is complex. It is acknowledged that communicators in ancient times, like those today, drew on various literary mechanisms – the simple and literal as well as the more poetical and allegorical. Even today, speakers often prefer beauty in language to express meaning that has no scientific counterpart; e.g. contemporary print and televised news reports include times for the next day's 'sunrise' and 'sunset,' or one might speak of the 'four corners of the earth' even though we know the sun is immobile and the earth is not square. Certainly part of the challenge of interpretation is to determine which texts are in which form (poetry vs. historical fact). For example, the mythology of the creation stories is often criticized in this day of unwavering scientific belief in evolution, and with one such criticism leveled, the Bible as a whole is frequently rejected. Unfortunately, doing so is like throwing the baby out with the bath water,⁴ if one can accommodate the early parts of Genesis as stories and other elements of the Bible as historical, inspirational, normative, or injunctions toward justice and caring.

The positivist perspective is an exacting approach to inquiry. In biblical scholarship, the starting point will be making sure that one has the cleanest copy possible of the Greek or Hebrew text. There is little point in spending much time interpreting scripture if it is subsequently found that the manuscripts themselves were missing sections or contained copyist errors. One also seeks evidence to understand the sociological context of the places and times in which those words were used, and the modification of word meaning over time. These data are also supplemented with any known historical records or inferences of the particular circumstances or situations, the *Sitz im Leben*, to help derive the likely intended purpose of the epistles and writings. The list is vast of the disciplines from which knowledge is sought before attempting a contemporary interpretation with its implications and moral imperatives.

Let us consider some examples. We will begin with the inquiry into a word's meaning, and proceed to the greater complexity of the use of sentences and complete thoughts, and indicators of data reliability.

Words as raw data (you think we have data problems!)

We will begin with the most fundamental unit of analysis, the word (or in this case, 'The Word'). Mick (1986) describes the role of semiotics to understand the morphology of signs and symbols, e.g. how a word comes to have meaning. New words are continually introduced into dynamic languages (e.g. 'internet'), and

Table 1
Comparing variant Greek manuscripts of Mark 10:25

easier	it is	a camel	thru	the	eye	the	of a needle	to go through
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ	τῆς	τρυμαλιᾶς	τῆς	ράφιδος	διελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ	τῆς	τρυμαλιᾶς	τῆς	ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		ἱρήματος		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν <u>δέ</u>	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
<u>τ. εἶον</u>		<u>κάμηλος</u>	διὰ		<u>τρυμαλιᾶδος</u>		ράφιδος	διελένυσται
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς	τῆς	ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ	τῆς	τρυμαλιᾶς		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		<u>τρυμαλιᾶς</u>		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	<u>κάμιλον</u>	διὰ		<u>τρυπήματος</u>		<u>βελόνης</u>	διελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	<u>κάμιλον</u>	διὰ		<u>τρυπήματος</u>		<u>βελόνης</u>	διελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	<u>κάμιλον</u>	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς	τῆς	ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
<u>οὐκοπώτερόν</u>	ἔστιν	<u>κάμιλον</u>	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς		ράφιδος	εἰσελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		<u>τρυπήματος</u>		<u>βελόνης</u>	διελθεῖν
εὐκοπώτερόν*	ἔστιν	κάμηλον	διὰ		τρυμαλιᾶς		ράφιδος	διελθεῖν

Source: Based on Swanson (1995); *possibly even εὐκολότερόν, 'easier' in Modern Greek.



word meanings change over time (e.g. 'cool'). As a result, the seemingly simple task of translating manuscripts from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek is nontrivial for documents that are 2000 years old; there is barely resemblance between these ancient languages and their contemporary counterparts.

Mick (1986) states that words or symbols are sometimes used as codes, e.g. to convey political meaning. As an example, consider the fish symbol that is seen occasionally affixed to car bumpers. One might think the fish is intended to bring to mind the story of Jesus multiplying the fish and bread loaves for the crowds,⁵ or his call to his fishermen disciples that they become 'fishers of men.'⁶ Both are good guesses but benign errors. The fish is an acronym in Greek. The Greek word for fish is *ιχθυς* (*ichthus*). Each letter in this word is the first letter of an ancient simple creed: *Ιησους* (Jesus), *Χριστου* (Christ, Messiah), *Θεου* (God's), *υιου* (son), *σωτηρ* (savior). When the ancient-time Christian approached a homestead building with a simple fish symbol scratched near its door, the visitor knew the inhabitants offered a safe house, where the like-minded visitor would not be betrayed and served to a large and hungry feline; the fish served as a subversive political code. (And of course, in recent times the fish on the car bumper morphed again, like any good symbol, to the Darwinian-believing driver's version of an amphibious fish with feet.) This fish story combines semiotics (theories of signs and symbols, particularly as their meanings relate to language) and philology (theories of literature and language analysis).

'You're going to try to put a what through the eye of a needle?'

To complicate matters further, not only do word meanings change over time, the words themselves changed slightly as they were copied by hand, by well-meaning and devout, yet indeed simply human scribes, over the centuries prior to Johann Gutenberg's press, c.1450. The accuracies of the results of this process are said to be vastly more impressive than the errors, and biblical scholars classify most textual errors as insignificant, i.e. having no theological import, being of the order of substituting, say, 'he' for 'his' where the meaning can clarify the proper word choice (Metzger, 1994; Strobel, 1998).⁷ Nevertheless, there are a few intriguing possibilities of semantic shifts.

Consider for example the expression, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'⁸ The usual modern-day interpretation is one that cautions the wealthy from depending upon their material goods for salvation, not recognizing their need for God, warning against haughtiness based on wealth, prompting the helping of the poor, and the like. Perhaps the expression is simply an example of the rhetorical device of hyperbole (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). But consider an alternative explanation.

Table 1 lists the Greek texts for families of manuscripts (e.g. those most closely related to that relied upon in the Vatican appear on the first line; the Alexandrian manuscripts, those from modern-day Turkey, etc., comprise other lines). The English translation appears on the header line to assist the reader, and all variants (from the Vatican copy) are underlined. Without a knowledge of Greek, the

variants for this handful of words appear numerous, but with a knowledge of the semantic content, the variations are less dramatic.

The focus for this hypothesis is the word under debate in the third column. It is true that most of the 'better' (older, more complete) manuscripts contain the word 'κάμηλον,' Greek for 'camel' (Swanson 1995). However, note that a number of manuscripts contain the word 'κάμιλον,' Greek for 'cable,' as in 'rope.' Perhaps the original tale was told not of a camel but of a rope. Figure 1 depicts a hypothesis of the morphing of this word. Perhaps the original storyteller used the word κάμιλον, as in, cable, rope: 'Do you know how difficult it is for a rich man to go to heaven? I'll tell you! It would be easier for me to cram this rope through this needle' (I paraphrase). And the story is recorded with the word κάμιλον, cable (Figure 1a).

In the next part, Figure 1(b), a well-meaning monk scribe innocently lets drip his καφε λατε from σταρβουκς, forming a drop over the critical vowel in 'κάμιλον.' The scribe notices his error, and makes his best guess as how to fill in the blank, κάμ_λον . . . α? ε? η? ι? ο? υ? ω? He selects the eta, writes κάμηλον, meaning camel, and as Figure 1(c) illustrates, the story is recorded about a camel, and the modern-day interpreter is perplexed.⁹ What an odd story! How can a camel go through the eye of a needle?

It is indeed an odd story on both its superficial and deeper structural levels. Hebraic and Aramaic poetry make great use of semantic balance, yet this story is hopelessly unbalanced. On the one hand, there is a sewing needle; on the other, a big desert animal.¹⁰ The only other story in which a camel appears in scripture is when it is contrasted to a gnat ('You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel').¹¹ The balance in that story is clearer; it is still hyperbole but a contrast between the smallest and largest animals known to the inhabitants of 100 A.D. Middle East. In our focal story, the cable or rope would provide superior balance to the needle – after all, a rope is simply a really thick thread. Theologically the difference probably seems small: neither the rope nor the camel is going through that needle. Still, one could imagine somehow patiently threading strands of the rope, whereas the camel is clearly impossible. The former suggests that the rich man might in some manner possibly get into heaven; the latter suggests not.

The oddness of this camel story has even motivated some biblical commentators to speculate upon the former existence of a particular, small gate through the walls surrounding Jerusalem, called 'The Eye of a Needle,'¹² with the interestingly consistent implication that a camel would need to be unloaded of its burden before it could pass through, much as a rich man would need to divest himself of his wealth before hoping to pass into the kingdom of heaven. There has been no archaeological find to support such a named gate, but this counter-argument is somewhat inconclusive given that many people believe in a lot of artifacts that have not been found (e.g. the ark that carried the commandment tablets, and that which carried Noah and his companions). If one believes in parsimony (as a lesser god), the accidental slip of a copyist seems to be a simpler explanation than a specially-named architectural structural component like a gate.



Ecclesiastes: gone with the wind

Let us consider another example, this time from the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes is typically interpreted in such a way as to suggest its author would have benefited greatly from Prozac.¹³ With little relief, it is dreary and pessimistic. The writer reflects upon a life's journey seeking meaning in pleasure and riches (e.g. 2:1–11), wisdom and work (2:12–23), power (4:1–3), etc., only to conclude, in most translations, 'all is vanity' (Ellul, 1990). Consider even its opening words from a modern interpretation:

The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?
A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises. (1:1–5)

I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun;
and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. (1:14)

If one took these words at face value, there would be little point in doing much of anything. (Struggling with reviewer comments? No point. Trying to improve teaching ratings? Why bother?) But in this illustration of a word study, there is some issue regarding the proper interpretation of the word 'hebel' (or 'hevel') which is translated above as 'vanity.'

It is possible that the meaning of Ecclesiastes' statements is not that all is vain, as in useless, futile, etc., per the usual translations, but rather, all is *temporary*, ephemeral or elusive (Davidson, 1983). Why might this alternative interpretation be valid? Fredericks (1993) makes a strong case for translating 'hevel' as breath or vapor, meaning temporary, but without any negative connotation or nuance of valuelessness. While a negative slant might be appropriate for some translations of hevel outside Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew text (e.g. idols are considered hevel, vain and valueless, in Deuteronomy 32:21, 1 Kings 16:13, etc.), Qoheleth says everything is hevel. There are many occasions elsewhere in text where hevel appears to have a Biblical meaning of 'temporary,' but not valueless: Psalm 144:3,4 states 'O Lord, what is man that thou dost regard him, or the son of man that thou dost think of him? Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow' a quote that is awed and upbeat in tenor, but one that focuses on brevity (Fredericks, 1993). The word for breath (hevel) may be contrasted with that for wind (ruah) to describe more clearly the brevity of existence (Fredericks, 1993; Ellul, 1990); ruah can be a powerful wind, but hebel is more like a 'puff of air.' Job (7:16) is thought to relay such transience in, 'Leave me alone, for my life is but a vapor' (hebel; Davidson, 1983: 187).

Temporariness can even occasionally be positive: knowing that suffering is also of limited duration can be helpful to relieve one in agony (Psalm 39). Thus the book can console rather than disturb the realist; no matter one's situation, 'this too shall pass.' According to this line of reasoning, the main point of the book,

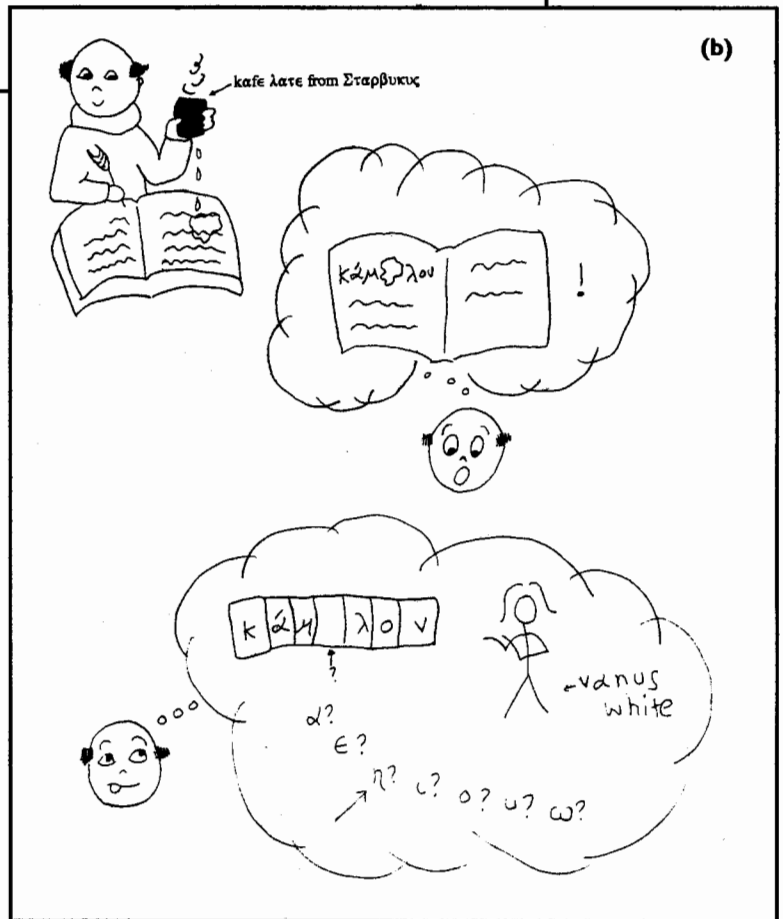
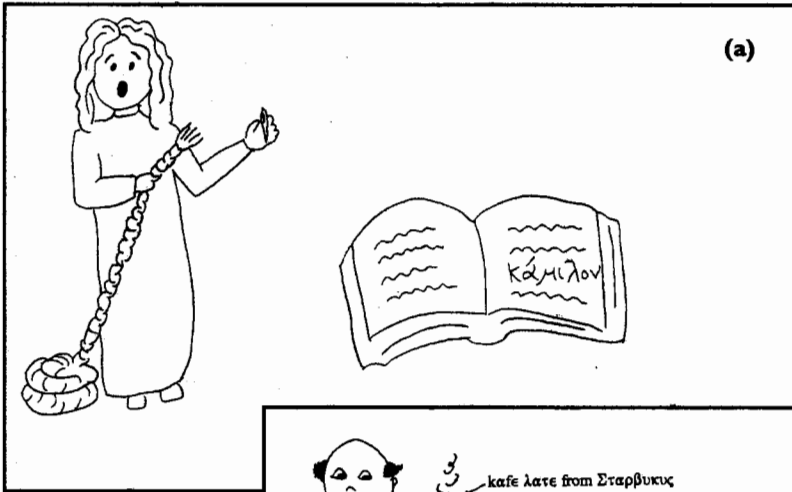


Figure 1 a, b, c

'You're going to try to put a what through the eye of a needle?'

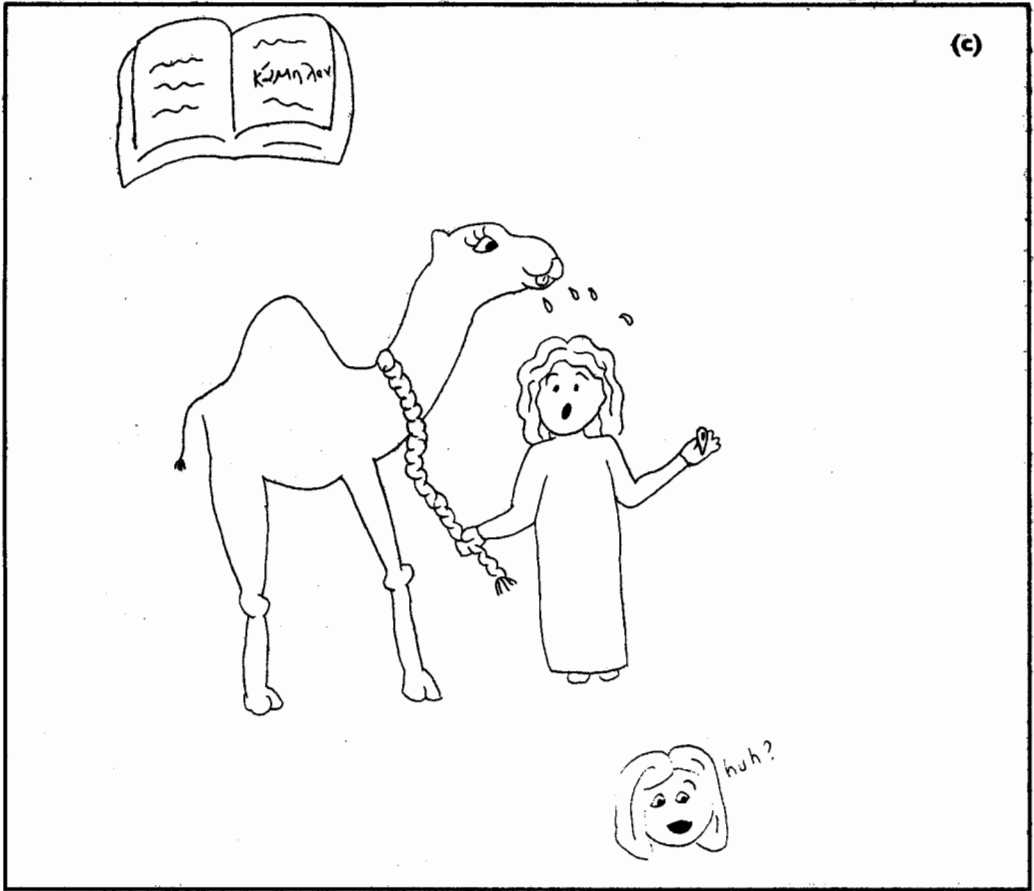


Figure 1 (continued)

which turns on this single word, is not the emptiness or vanity of life, but rather, more simply, its impermanence.

The word 'hevel' itself is aspirated and it is used more than 30 times in Ecclesiastes. 'To understand [the breath] metaphor . . . is to understand the book' (Fredericks, 1993: 12). The breath metaphor is even applied nicely to the beautiful 'season' poem. It 'breathes rhythmically with metrical inhaling and exhaling. A time for this, a time for that. . . Inhale, exhale; inhale, exhale' (Fredericks, 1993: 27–8):

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace. (3:1–8)

Ecclesiastes is startling in its complexity and its unwillingness to accept easy answers:

Book after book in the Old Testament insists . . . that life is meaningful . . . Along comes Qoheleth and coolly says, 'It is all hebel, you are wasting your time looking for meaning; there is none.' This does not mean that Qoheleth finds life uninteresting . . . Nor does it mean that life is not enjoyable . . . What it does mean is that life to him was an insoluble puzzle . . . It is as if he had taken a long cool look at life, turned away, shrugged his shoulders and said, 'well I don't know.' Life had for him a will o' the wisp quality. (Davidson, 1983: 188–9)

Ecclesiastes does not make the point that life cannot be enjoyable.¹⁴ Instead, he emphasizes that life is simply not understandable. The last part of the quote is consistent with the interpretative emphasis on impermanence, breath as vapor, as a key to understanding that in Ecclesiastes, life has a 'will o' the wisp' quality. This interpretation is much more positive than the traditional interpretation of Ecclesiastes: i.e. 'everything is temporary' vs. 'everything we do is without value.' As we have attempted to demonstrate, the meaning of this focal word is inferred from convergent evidence elsewhere in scripture.¹⁵

Summary on words as raw data

Other examples of the criticality of the word as a raw data point abound. Sometimes the exercise is not so much 'deconstruction' of the word (Stern, 1996) as translation from an unfamiliar ancient language. In the reports of the secular trial of Jesus, Pilate asks the crowd whether Jesus or a political prisoner named Barabbas should be released. The crowd shouts for Barabbas. The story is ironic given that Jesus is said to be Son of God, or in trinitarian theology, Son of the Father, if one knows that in Aramaic 'bar' translates to 'son of' and 'abba' is 'father,' namely, 'daddy.' In essence the crowd is poetically pitched as saying, 'No, don't release the Son of the Father, just release the son of the father.'

The two books known as Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus, who may have been a historical person, the intended recipient of Dr Luke's writings. A delightful puzzle is posed though, when the name is translated, 'God-lover.' Some scholars believe the writings were addressed for public consumption to anyone who purported to love God and wished to learn more. Hence the name Theophilus was a device to model the appropriate target audience.

The reader has probably also heard of attempts by scholars of English literature to discern whether certain plays and sonnets and perennially newly discovered



writings belong to the pen of Shakespeare, or some other author. Closer to home, Mosteller and Wallace (1989) computed rates of word usage, focusing on unique words to classify a number of political papers according to whether they were written by Hamilton, who, for example, had a penchant for the word 'while,' or to Madison who preferred 'whilst.' Biblical scholars have an analogous pursuit trying to determine whether Paul wrote 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.¹⁶ Recently, new musical scores have been found and claimed to be missing works of Mozart. There are comparable methods in musicology to demonstrate convergence with the focal composer's style and divergence from alternative composers' styles.

These examples illustrate the complexity of the most minute data point, the word. In the next section, we see the greater challenge of a vector of words comprising sentences and thought units.

Sections of words as more complex thoughts

In the 'camel' example, we considered a scenario in which a word might have been accidentally modified. We now consider whether we can detect revisions that might have been intentional for theological or political reasons. The following is an excerpt from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:26–40, New Revised Standard Version):

What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.

Contained in this excerpt is the focal pericope of verses 33b–36, a cite sometimes used against women. Who is mandating the (seeming) proclamation against women? Later political preachers and church politics? Paul? Or god forbid, God? Attributing the mandate to each different source results in radically different views of women's roles in the church and wider society, and is manifest in denomination differences.

Biblical scholars tend not to use the word 'hypothesis,' but we consumer behavior researchers do, and so to facilitate communication, I shall do that here. Hypothesis 1, then, might be that St Paul wrote the entire excerpt quoted above.

In consumer behavior terms, Paul is a man of great 'source credibility,' so if H1 holds, normative behavior for women in church would be demure silence. Alternatively, H2 might be that H1 held in ancient times, but needs socio-cultural updating to progressively embrace contemporary roles for women. (Support for H2 over H1 would have to draw from socio-political sources, external to the scriptural source itself.)

H3 might be that Paul did not write the focal pericope, but a later redactor (i.e. editor) inserted the words. Variants of this hypothesis might be derived from different motivations. H3a might be that the redactor was a misogynist. H3b might be that the redactor added the words to serve a local parish problem, e.g. numerous mystery religious cults abounded, many headed by women, so perhaps the inserted words meant not so much, 'no women should speak,' but rather, 'those women shouldn't speak.' H3c might be that the congregation meetings were slowed down by the women asking questions, given that now they were allowed to participate whereas under their previous religious cultures (as female Jews or Gentiles) they were not, and so they had much catching up to do. In any event, the redactor might have written his comments in the margins, a 'gloss,' which then became incorporated into the next hand-written copy which was perpetually retained thereafter and canonized in the form quoted above.

Various methodological approaches can be used to tease apart these alternative explanations, drawing from historical sociological, cultural, anthropological and archaeological disciplines. And while we might not be able to conclude with certainty which H was 'true,' we should be able to reject some H's, and reason that others garner more support as plausible. (Being unable to conclude definitively is distressing only if we have deceived ourselves into thinking that we are capable of achieving such clarity in our contemporary research.)

Let us attempt to distinguish at least between H1&H2 (i.e. Paul wrote it) and the H3's (he did not). First, note these words are in parentheses. The parentheses themselves are a hypothesis. Greek manuscripts did not contain punctuation – papyrus and parchment were scarce and expensive, so writing was dense and compact, without periods or paragraph breaks. (Writing itself was fairly new; ancient learning and passing of cultural identity depended more on oral tradition and extensive memories.) The Hebrew versions of books of the Old Testament were even written without vowels (to save additional space), as are some modern-day Hebrew prints. Imagine the difficulty in deciphering the meaning of the famous enigmatic puzzle: GDSNWHR. Does it help to add the vowels: GODISNOWHERE? Even with the vowels, the phrase is not unambiguously interpreted, and one's interpretation may well be a function of one's a priori theory or theology. Returning to our pericope, the fact that it is published inside parentheses indicates that the biblical experts comprising the societies responsible for publishing the Bibles are also not certain how to treat the text.

One means to begin to test the comparative hypotheses is to consider the flow of the letter if the parenthetical statements were excised. One then notices thematic continuity: the writer speaks of various spiritual gifts and orderliness of worship in both the paragraph preceding and that following the excised material.



Re-inserting the temporarily deleted material emphasizes its choppiness. Its lack of flowing thought has been used as evidence of the hypotheses that suggest the material is not Paul's. Note that this test is essentially one of a content analysis of qualitative material, and the question posed is whether the themes are constant across the three paragraphs. Researchers also look for stylistic changes, but these are more difficult to detect unless one is fluent in the original languages, since whatever style differences there might have been would have been greatly smoothed prior to publication in a vulgar language such as English.

The detection of content shifts does not allow for error-free certainty that the parenthetical statements were indeed not Paul's. Consider the choppiness of one's own correspondence (e.g. emails to friends), yet the lack of continuity of thought does not mean that it was not composed by a sole author.

These are the kinds of criteria that such scholars would use to support one hypothesis as being more likely than another. As with our consumer behavior research, the more evidence marshaled against (or in support of) a hypothesis, the less (or more) confidence we would have in the hypothesis (of course confidence is not certainty, but it represents the result of an educated theoretical/theological guess). In sum, the pericope is more likely attributed to Paul if there were evidence of both thematic and stylistic smoothness over the three paragraphs, and external evidence (e.g. other documentation) supporting an antagonistic view toward women; and less likely if copies of manuscripts were to be found with the gloss, etc.

Gospel parallels and multiple informants

Just as the previous example has demonstrated, in our consumer behavior research we seek triangulation and convergence to strengthen our confidence in interpretations and conclusions. In testing coding schemes for qualitative data such as interviews or experiments that elicit thoughts listings, one might expect a (positivist) researcher to report an index of inter-rater reliability: to what extent did the judges agree in their assignments of thoughts to codes? How clean are the data? In the study of business relationships in marketing, multiple informants from each firm are sought to characterize each partner in a business network and to assess the qualities of their inter-relating ties. Inter-rater, or multiple informant, agreement is a form of convergence.

Biblical scholars have a similar criterion called multiple attestation. When the same story is recorded in different books, how similar are the tellings, from the main points to the subtle nuances? When there are differences, can they be explained in substantively meaningful ways, or do they resemble noise or error? Questions like these are posed frequently of the gospels. The gospel attributed to John is thought to be more theologically advanced and spiritual, and rather different from the others. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the 'synoptic gospels' ('syn' for 'together' like synagogue) because when they are seen together, their similarities are striking. They are often analyzed 'in parallel' to enhance the

Table 2

Synoptic Gospel Parallels

Jesus Blesses the Children

Matthew 19:13–15

Mark 10:13–16

Luke 18:15–17

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. **The disciples spoke sternly** to those who brought them; **but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs . . . Truly I tell you,** unless you change and become like children, you **will never enter** the kingdom of heaven." **And he laid his hands on them** and went on his way.

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. *But* when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. **But Jesus** called for them and **said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you,** whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child **will never enter it."**

The Stilling of the Storm

Matthew 8:18, 23–27

Mark 4:35–41

Luke 8:22–25

. . . A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "**Why are you afraid, you of little faith?**" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm . . .

. . . A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He

said to them, "**Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?**" . . .

underlined = common to Matthew and Mark; *italics* = common to Mark and Luke
bold = common to Matthew and Luke



Table 2 (cont.)

<i>On Retaliation</i>		
Matthew 5:38–42	Mark	Luke 6:29–30
<p>“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”</p>		<p>“If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.</p> <p>Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.”</p>

Source: Based on Throckmorton (1992)

ease with which the similarities and differences may be noted. As an example, Table 2 contains the three versions of one of the stories in which Jesus blesses children. The similarities between these writings are marked to help visualize their commonalities and distinctions.

Perhaps all three documents were created independently (though all presumably drew on common oral traditions), but the similarities among these gospels have led scholars to form hypotheses about their interdependencies. Many scholars believe Mark may have been written first, because Matthew and Luke follow it closely in structure, and where Matthew diverges, Luke continues, and vice versa. The reader may have heard of the so-called ‘Lost Gospel’ or the ‘Gospel of Q.’ This is a hypothetical document (indeed it might never have existed in written, only oral form) that was conceptualized to support the suggestion that in addition to Mark as a source of information, another source must have existed, because there are sections in Matthew and Luke that are highly similar but that are not contained in Mark.

This analysis, ‘source criticism,’ tries to understand the sources from which the writers composed their material. (The Gospel of Q gets its name from the German word for source, *Quelle*.) Figure 2 depicts this prevalent hypothesis, that Matthew draws upon Mark and Q, as does Luke, and in addition, other sources, perhaps oral, give rise to the unique material in Matthew (M) and Luke (L).

Also depicted in Figure 2 is the extraordinarily similar logic underlying factor analysis. Mark and Q would be analogous to 'common factors' giving rise to multiple indicator variables, and M and L would be like 'unique factors' giving rise to only one of the variables/gospels. Factor analysis, like source criticism, posits there is learning in both the commonalities and differences across the variables or gospels, though certainly in both cases the emphasis is on that which is common.

Some points of difference across the synoptics are attributed to the fact that different intended audiences were targeted. It may be a stretch to call them an example of segmentation, targeting, and positioning, but certainly the writers knew their intended audiences, and shaped their expositions accordingly. The gospels are a genre that, while containing biographical and historical information, are primarily intended to be evangelical, theologically persuasive documents – they were written with a celebratory marketing agenda and they were directed at specific groups of people.¹⁷ Matthew is thought to have targeted the Jews, Mark and Luke the Gentiles. The audience differences come across in word choices. For example, continuing in Table 2, we see the story of Jesus calming the stormy waters and his sailing companions. The disciples are rebuked rather harshly in Mark ('Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?') and Luke ('Where is your faith?') but more gently in Matthew ('Why are you afraid, you of little faith?'). Jews already had a tradition of 'believing', so the word-choice was 'little faith,' whereas the story as told to Gentiles who were newer to a tradition of faith was more stern.

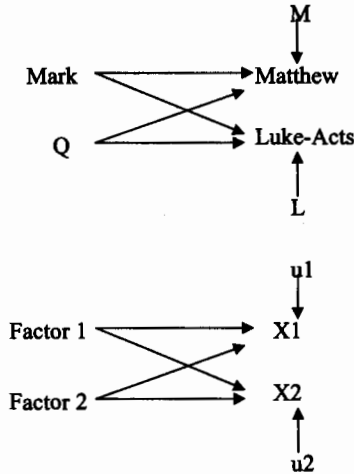
Another example of the message being shaped for the particular audience comprises the last example in Table 2. (Note that the story does not even appear in Mark; hence it would be attributed to Q.) The story sets up the enormously forgiving ethic of 'turning the other cheek,' which is far more gracious than the previous 'eye for an eye.'¹⁸ Matthew begins his story by saying 'You have heard that it was said . . .' because the 'eye for an eye' reciprocity ethic was contained in their Hebrew scriptures, so the intended Jewish audience would have been familiar with the standard that was now being modified. Luke is writing to a Gentile audience who are less likely to be familiar with the reciprocity law, and so he simply deletes those words – there is no point in saying 'You have heard that it was said' if in fact the audience would not have done so.

In sum, the commonalities across the synoptic gospels may be explained by positing two common factors: a temporal ordering that assumes the material in Mark was available for Matthew and Luke, and a hypothetical document, or oral knowledge base, to explain the remainder. The differences may be explained by theorizing unique factors: material to which only Matthew had access, or only Matthew used, and similarly material unique to Luke.

A serious student of the Bible would consume all four gospels, to be thorough, and in recognition that all four are deemed insightful in the formation of the Bible as a canonized unit. However, the different styles of the four gospels help to explain why many religious consumers have a 'favorite' gospel. The styles of the gospel evangelical writers have been mapped onto the Myers-Briggs personality types, for example (Michael and Norrisey, 1991), so that while these sources

Figure 2

Source criticism and factor analysis



largely converge in their material, one might speak to one consuming segment and another to another.

Many more examples of textual and social science inquiry to aid in the interpretation of Biblical excerpts are available, including the use of rationalism and cluster analysis (!) to understand the theoretical solutions to the puzzle posed by 1 Peter 3:18–22,¹⁹ and the use of correlation and symbolic logic ($p \rightarrow q$) to deconstruct the apologetic logic of Augustine defending Christians against the accusation of the Gothic attack on Rome in 410.

Conclusion

Some audiences of the talk on which this paper is based commented that it might be useful to attempt to document early consumer behavior and marketing thought, and descendant theories, before they too escape us as historically distant (e.g. Jones and Monieson, 1990). Such an attempt would be relatively easier to execute than the inquiries described in this paper, given that consumer behavior and marketing documents began appearing in earnest in the 1950s compared with epistles and gospels of the 0050s.

Similarly, historical strains of advertising themes, brand names, or logos could easily be studied. Such analyses could examine the pendular popularity of featuring different elements in advertising copy over the years (Stern, 1989), or the change in ad copy to reflect the current events of their times.

While it has been noted that some hermeneutical tools have been extracted from biblical scholarship and applied to consumer behavior (Arnold and Fischer,

1994), the tradition is long and rich, and more tools could be lent. For example, Stern (1989: 323) notes that there is no particular framework or methods for studying certain poetic text qualities, such as rhythm, rhyme, or sound devices. Yet many character-based phenomena exist. For example, much of the Old Testament, and the hymnal of Psalms in particular, have rhetorical structures that are standard in identification. The structures were thought to partly reflect the poetic quality of many of the writings, and partly to aid in the recollection of the psalter or the worshipers, who may well not have been literate, but who passed along traditions and stories to subsequent generations. For example, in some psalms, the first line begins with each letter of the (Hebrew) alphabet. Other psalms are structured to have an: a, b, a', b' quality, where a' is a modified restatement of 'a' and b' of 'b,' again, to aid memory, as well as to serve the poetic function of providing emphasis. Still other writings have the structure a, b, c, d, e, d', c', b', a'; this is called chiasm, and the structure is thought to emphasize the innermost line, e in this case. Perhaps 'Madison Avenue' is not capable of the same literary finesse, but the point stands that more methods await the interested scholar.

Notes

I cannot tell you how gratifying it has been to present this research to such delighted and supportive audiences as those at the Universities of Arizona, Chicago, Georgia, Illinois, Washington, Maastricht, Harvard, Vanderbilt, Northwestern, and the 1998 Psychometric Society conference. It has encouraged me to know that in the midst of our ordinary responsibilities and sometimes traditional research streams, we are yearning to be intellectually playful and broad-thinking. Special thanks to Yiorgos Bakamitsos for double-checking the Greek in this manuscript. I am also grateful to Steve Brown, Kent Grayson, Robert Kozinets, Sidney Levy, John Sherry, and Barbara Stern for their comments on this manuscript.

- 1 I report on lessons learned about consuming, specifically interpreting, the Bible from recently having attended and earned a graduate degree at a seminary.
- 2 'Postmodern' or perhaps 'post-structural,' more literary in inception.
- 3 The metaphor of circle is being left behind in biblical scholarship due to its implication that after iterating between text and readership to obtain meaning, one arrives at the same point from which one started. The 'hermeneutical spiral' connotes better a process of broadening meaning, greater enrichment, and development beyond the point of origin (Osborne, 1991).
- 4 Consider the quote by none other than Galileo who said, 'The Bible was not given us to teach us how the heavens go, but to teach us how to go to heaven.'
- 5 Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–13; cf. Matthew 15:32–9.
- 6 Matthew 4:18–25; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11.
- 7 Many errors of transcription are of an understandable sort. If two lines contain similar words, the copyist may lose the place and either repeat or skip a line. When similar letters or words appear at the beginning of a line, the phenomenon is called homoeoarcton, at the end of the line, homoeoteleuton (Metzger, 1994: 3); cf. McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) classes of rhetorical devices, anaphora and epistrophe, respectively.



- 8 Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.
- 9 Positing another alternative explanation, some manuscripts were created in scriptoria by multiple scribes who wrote as they heard words by dictation, read from an already complete manuscript. In our example, κμηλον, and κάμιλον are homonyms, lending aural confusion.
- 10 Camels are not unknown to the consumer behavior literature. Stern's (1996: 140) presentation of deconstruction as analysis of a text's words includes an examination of camels in art and literature, as beasts of burden with 'frightening size but gentle demeanor.' Camels are also of the 'unclean' category, offering an interpretation as redemption or cleansing.
- 11 Matthew 23:24; camels appear elsewhere in scripture, but only in descriptions, e.g. she watered the camels, their donkeys and camels were numerous, etc.
- 12 O'Guinn and Belk (1989: 236) also mention this alternative hypothesis.
- 13 The book is traditionally attributed to King Solomon, but the named author is simply Qoheleth, a feminine derivative of 'qahal' meaning 'to assemble,' hence the common labels of Teacher or Preacher (to an assembly). An alternative interpretation has been offered that Qoheleth was not so much a preacher to an assembly, but rather an 'assembler,' editor if you will, of maxims, ideas, proverbs, etc., collecting them together into this book. This perspective is related to the possibility that Qoheleth might instead be derived from 'qalal' meaning 'to disparage, criticize, dispute'; which suggests that the title Qoheleth is to be understood in terms of the book's contents rather than the person identification (Ellul, 1990).
- 14 He makes many suggestions about joy and pleasurable activities, and several of his chapters are devoted to giving advice (e.g. Chs. 5, 7, 10), which presumably would be pointless if he held an entirely futile view of life.
- 15 This book is also the source of the saying that we academics might take to heart, 'Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh' (Eccl. 12:12b).
- 16 These inquiries are variants on 'authorship' scholarship (cf. Stern, 1989).
- 17 Much as advertising is recognized even by consumers as a persuasive genre (Scott, 1994).
- 18 The reciprocity ethic in the Old Testament is also one of grace. 'An eye for an eye' is frequently misunderstood to be a license for vengeance (if you take my eye, I will take yours) but most scholars say it was rather a rule intended as a constraint, i.e. 'only' an eye for an eye (if you take my eye, I cannot kill you).
- 19 As Peter Rossi commented at the seminar at Chicago, 'The Lord works in mysterious ways!'

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