

A Response to Dr. Ishida Manabu's paper, "The Scriptures as the Book of sacred Drama of God's Holy people: Interpreting the Scriptures in Japanese Context."

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The multiple contexts in Asia and the Pacific suggest and require multi forms of biblical hermeneutics and multi-reading of a biblical text. One reason is that hermeneutics cannot be confined to a specific methodology. For instance, in addition to the traditional historico-grammatical approach are other approaches which are necessitated by the very nature of the text.¹ Moreover, hermeneutics is not confined and provincialized to biblical studies: it is a long dominant concept and pursuit in philosophy as the latter searches for meaning and understanding of life and existence, hence, being.² One dominant theme of post modernity is respect to personal ideas and understanding - precisely because one can no longer claim a totalized perspective of reality.³ Human being that is thinking is situated and limited by his or her own being-there. Thus, humans are finite, and to understand each other's dialogue is necessary.

Dr. Ishida proposes an alternative way of reading the Scriptures, that is, reading the Scriptures as a drama, a literary approach whereby contemporary readers correlate the biblical drama with his or her own communal and existential realities. The goal of this eclectic approach is transformation. Readers become participants as the drama is being "read." To suggest that the Scriptures be read, as drama does not negate the significance of understanding the historical context of the text, that is, to know how the faith community of the text experienced God in their particular context. However, this endeavor is meaningful when the contemporary reader/interpreter is also aware of his or her socio-cultural and political context. It is to this effect that Kim writes, "The preacher-interpreter is not a private, independent reader of a biblical text, but a representative of a community of faith that is eager to hear the word of God in its particular context."⁴

Dr. Ishida demonstrates his methodology choosing I Cor. 10:1-13 as the model which he correlates with a Japanese socio-historical perspective, employing three strata in reading the Scriptures as a sacred drama. The first stratum is the Israelite context

¹See Jonathan V. Exiomo, "The Significance of Paul Ricoeur's Theory of Text and Interpretation for Selected Christian and Missionary Alliance of the Philippines Pastor's Orientations to the Bible Taken as Religious Text Necessitating the Task of Interpretation" (Th.D. diss., Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, 2002), 86, 129; 159-164.

²Eunjoo Mary Kim noted hermeneutics is not confined to biblical hermeneutics. It is used in the broader sense that is in philosophy, literature, aesthetics and theology (Eunjoo Mary Kim, "Hermeneutics and Asian American Preaching," *Semeia* 90/91: 271).

³For an analogy, see Roy I. Sano, "Shifts in Reading the Bible: Hermeneutical Moves Among Asian Americans," in *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 117.

⁴Kim, *Semeia* 90/91: 272-3.

which is remote. The second stratum is Paul and the Corinthians. Paul utilized the story of the Israelites in the desert, as it was a story of failure, in order to teach the Corinthian believers the lesson from the story of the Israelites. Thus, Paul correlated the Corinthian's spiritual dilemma with that of Israel. On the third stratum, Dr. Ishida brought into the story his own socio-political and historical context, making a parallel of his story with that of Israel. He noted that the issue and problem were not the same: it was not "mere individual morality and holiness," but it has to do with the Japanese Christians' "communal ethics and socio-political behavior."

Such correlation is commendable for two reasons. First, Dr. Ishida shows a dynamic interplay of pre-critical and post-critical nature of understanding, with a "fusion of horizons,"⁵ that of his and that of the text. Such endeavor was honest and void of pretension, for each interpreter of the Scriptures cannot be void of "bias" regardless of the claims and assertions to that effect. Second, Dr. Ishida demonstrates a critical analysis of his own context. He lives in his "ministry-world" and lives with his people. He is aware of their story as a people, and he used the text with a view of "correcting" their ethics and behavior with an intention to bring about a correlation between holiness and social justice, and sanctification and pacificism." As a method of interpretation, reading the Scriptures as drama assumes that the "first" reading of the text brings the reader into the world of the text. The initial correlation that takes place then is an entry point that leads to a greater awareness that what one reads has greater correlation with that of his or her perceived context. Hence, this presupposes the dynamic nature of the biblical text in its essence.

As a method, reading the Scriptures as Sacred drama has limitations. It is my assumption, however, that this method sits at par with other on credibility. Because the ultimate goal of hermeneutics is that of transformation into Christ likeness, drama has to be given credence. Dr. Ishida testifies to a life that is in grace, enlightened to see the "dramatic" nature of the biblical text in a way that his people, and perhaps many of us here, identify with. Limitations do not negate validity. Rather, they evoke freedom and respect. The limits will be considered accordingly using an analogical framework.

In reading the Scriptures as a drama of God and God's people, certain analogical relationship is given.⁶ First in this analogical relationship is that correspondence. As indicated, this relationship emphasizes similarities. As Dr. Ishida, there was an identification of the biblical story with that of the Japanese Christians. By reading a drama in Israel's story, Japanese Christians, with their own distinctive history, are enabled to see a direct correspondence with their own story. He agrees that the point

⁵Anthony T. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 333.

⁶I am indebted to my mentor, Dr. Tereso Casino, for exposing me to the role of this "model" in reading and interpreting the Scriptures.

of correlation the Apostle Paul identified can also be said of the Japanese Christians. The second is that of synthetic relationship. This relationship emphasizes shared and interrelated characteristics. Part of the biblical drama was viewed by Dr. Ishida as part of his socio-political context. Despite the “historical gap”, some interrelated features are apparent. The third is that of contrastive relationship. This, obviously, focuses on the differences and discontinuity. The biblical drama can stand by itself and while not everything in the “cultural drama” needs to be correlated, the socio-political context too can exist independently. The goal here is to appraise the differences and not to craft unseemingly parallels in the story. This area can be an entry point for “eisegesis,” but hardly could be “judged” as such when the interpreter brings his or her world and the world of the text together in honest pursuit to “enliven” God’s word to the hearers.

With its aim at transformation, the reading of the Scriptures as drama is an appropriate alternative. We, in Asia and the Pacific, have been seeking for ways and methods to articulate and communicate the Wesleyan understanding of holiness. Although not always, our statements remain academic and propositional following Aristotelian logic.⁷ Our people understand it by head, although confusion remains. However, there seems to be a lack of drive and pursuit to holy living, and connection and association with biblical text. Dr. Ishida challenges us to retell the story of salvation, or, if I may say, the “story of holiness” which might bring our people to a quest and hungering for holy living and thereupon be filled (Matt 5:6).⁸ If, and because, reading the Scriptures as sacred drama motivates Nazarenes in Asia and the Pacific to shun sin—be it social, political, religious, personal and communal—and pursue obedience and growth into Christ likeness, which is the fulfillment of being, then as method it deserves respect.

⁷Obviously, many biblical texts are propositional in nature, such as some of Paul’s letters, some of the Psalms and Proverbs, just to name a few. Sano considers the “selection” of texts as “functional canon.” See, Sano, *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 105, 117

⁸See, Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994).