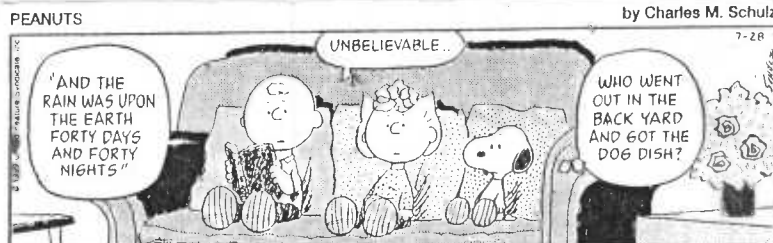
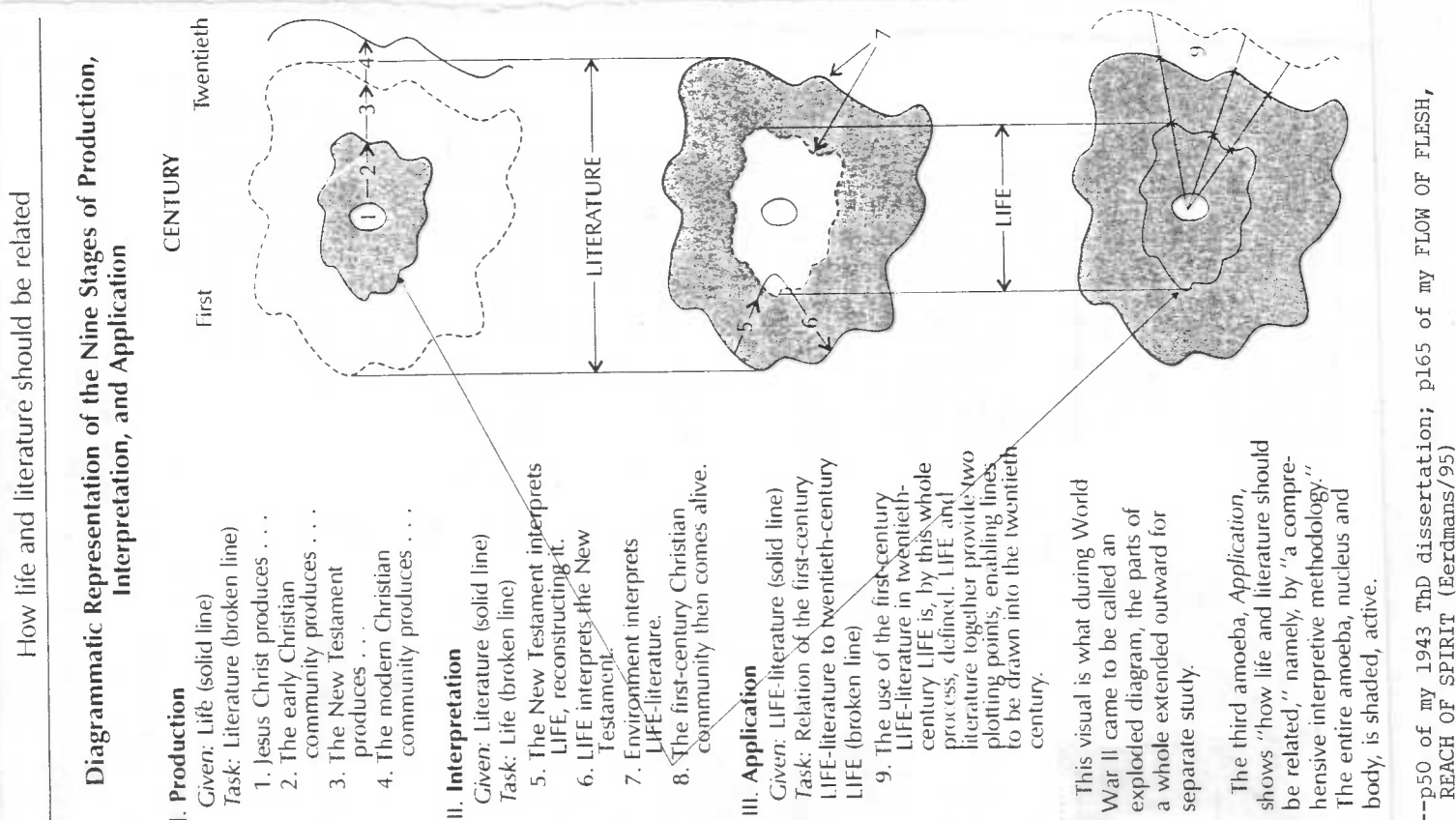


1 Some fresh metaphors prove so useful that they quickly spread from the discipline of origin to other disciplines. So it has been with "thick," meaning rich & full & deep (antonyms: poor & skimpy & shallow), 1st used (I think) by sociologist Clifford Geertz as "thick description."....Leap to theology: In a personal letter last month, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian appropriately uses the metaphor to distinguish between Bible-only (*sola scriptura*) theology & Bible++Church (i.e., tradition+magisterium) theology....On this wise letter, more below. At this point I need only to affirm it's wisdom, which this Thinksheet's title states.

2 Have you noticed that the creator of "Peanuts" subtly & persistently promotes oral **Bible reading**? In today's cartoon we see two hearer-responses: Lucy's doubt & Snoopy's need. The former, a sense-making problem; the latter, a theological problem (how did Providence operate in the Bible Story [the whole 9 yards])? Some who don't read/hear the Bible have no questions about it: to them, it's useless ancient literature. Others don't read/hear the Bible & have questions about it (Schultz often aims at them). Some read/hear the Bible & have no questions about it: they have a ritual relation to Scripture but don't think about what it says. This brings us to classification #4 with Lucy & Snoopy: they read/hear the Bible & **think** about what they read/hear, maybe also **pray** about it. For these evening conversations, away with the other three classifications: you wouldn't be here this evening if you weren't in classification #4.



3 **Life precedes literature:** The Bible is sacred writings about the lived experiences of holy & unholy lives. It is, one might say, a distillate or deposit (*depositum fidei*, deposit of faith) from those lives, lives which hermeneutics aims to bring into touch with our lives:



4 But that life (the life of Bible times) is only **mediately** (not immediately) available to this life, ours. The mediation is through (1) words heard only through reading (phoning is hearing; e-mail is only hearing through reading), & (2) reading skills (hermeneutics, the science & art of interpretation), & (3) tradition (the lore of historical responses to Scripture: the "thickness" is not just life then + life now but also Christians-&-churches living in between then & now). At the deepest level (depth & thickness are related!), our profound interest in that (biblical) life derives from our conviction that that was, by the will of God, the world's supreme instance of **God-hearing** life, through which we hope to hear God (which is why I instruct the lectors I train to precede their oral liturgical readings of Scripture with "Let us listen for [not "to"! the Word of God]). (Theologians honor the distinction by calling their hearing "revelation" & ours, "inspiration.")

5 In computerease, "**access**" has become a verb. (Our son Mark www-accesses & downloads [prints] items he thinks would be of special interest to me.) We Christians want to access what God has to say to us (the God whose Word created "all things" & who himself came as the Word Jesus), & we have a range of notions as to how we "get through" from our side. (Topside, how God gets through to us, is a theological, not a hermeneutical issue.) Oversimplified, here's the list (not detailing the many blends among the options):

(1) **Pray**. The "enthusiastic" or spiritual or Quaker way (not that the Society of Friends discourages attention to Scripture).

(2) **Read the King James Version** of the Bible without conscious influence from tradition or training in interpretation. Jn. Wyclif, 1st to "English" the Bible, had faith that "every ploughboy" who became literate could understand the Bible & therein find correct guidance for faith, thought, & life. His was a naive faith in the Protestant principle of freedom without aid from Catholic (tradition-informed) substance. He was right: Millions (like Augustine, hearing "Tolle, lege" [Take up & read!]) have come to the Faith by opening a Bible (e.g., a hotel-room Gideon Bible) & reading. He was also wrong: Millions (e.g., Mormons & Jehovah's Witnesses) have been misled by intellectually & historically ignorant readers of the KJV (such as ploughboy Joseph Smith & "Pastor" Russell). That 14th-c. (Roman) Church was wrong in wanting to keep the Bible out of lay hands (& in rage exhuming W. & burning his bones) --but we Protestants should grant Rome's central points: (a) The Bible is the fundamental literary product of the earliest Church (as I began §3, "Life precedes literature") & requires, for its adequate understanding, the dead Church (tradition) & the living Church (the congregation, the communion [denomination, "church"], & "the Church throughout the world"--in short, "the mind of the Church" (which, for the Roman Church, is, in short, the magisterium)); (b) The clergy should guide the laity in Bible-understanding; (c) Clergy should be trained in Bible by Christians who are competent specialists in Bible & related studies.

(3) Individual-&-group **prayerful reading** of the Bible, trusting (Calvin) "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit". Daily, individual & family. Life-long periodic group Bible-study. And hearing the Bible read in communal worship.

6 Christ the Head speaks in & through his Body the Church (Eph. 1.22-23; 4. 15-16; Col. 1.18,24). The letter (§1, above), in orthodox Roman fashion, uses "the church" to mean the Roman Catholic Church. While I cannot agree to that limitation (since I include "the separated brethren" [Rome's old phrase for nonRoman Christians] in "the Church"), I have come to believe more & more in "thick" **ecumenical listening**--negatively put, that it's wrong not to know what your neighbors-in-Christ are thinking. Talking/thinking is the audio-glue of community & so of the (whole) Body of Christ through history & now in the world.

7 The first words of this Thinksheet are "Remember/Forget." God has given us the gift of lethe, forgetfulness (or our minds could have no clarity & peace), but also the gift of memory (or we'd be able to live only in the thin present: memory & hope give us thickness). The main motive for writing the Bible was **mnemonic**: the Bible's a memory device. A century after the Resurrection, Papias said he preferred "the living voice" of Jesus' apostles, one of whom he heard in his youth. NPR's Jay Allison's "Quest for Sound" is gathering old audio-recordings & has one from a man who was present at the Gettysburg Address. The Bible is only e-mail, not telephone. But through it we can, in our imagination, hear the living voices.