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## Review Article

Craig Bartholomew, Antony Thiselton (Gen Eds.), *Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, Vols IV-VIII (2003-2007)*

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### SUMMARY

This ambitious project with major partners from Britain and North America has collected a vast and impressive range of scholars most of whom are committed to some

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### RÉSUMÉ

Ce projet ambitieux fait appel aux contributions d'une grande et impressionnante diversité de spécialistes anglo-saxons qui, pour la plupart, adhèrent à l'idée que la Bible est un moyen par lequel la voix du Dieu qui transforme

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### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses ehrgeizige Projekt mit großen Partnern aus Großbritannien und Nordamerika hat eine enorme und beeindruckende Bandbreite von Gelehrten versammelt, von denen sich die meisten in irgendeiner Form einer Vision

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Having reviewed the first three volumes in 2003, as promised I review the five which have followed. I proceed by describing what I see to be the significant arguments of each volume and *in bold italics give my own thoughts on the matter*. This is, I hope less criticism for its own sake, as the expression of a desire to move the discussion onwards.

### Vol IV: 'Behind' the Text. History and Biblical Interpretation (2003)

Here Alvin Plantinga takes on Robert Gordon; van Inwagen lines up against Colin Greene and Joel Green, and there is an essay by William Alston

vision of the bible as allowing God's transforming voice to be heard in the church and world today. The contents are sketched here, with some critical observation and a conclusion that the sum of the parts is greater than the whole, but is impressive nonetheless.

se fait entendre dans l'Église et le monde d'aujourd'hui. La recension présente le contenu de ces ouvrages, et offre quelques observations critiques, pour conclure que la somme des bonnes choses qu'on peut y glaner vaut mieux que l'ensemble, mais que le résultat est toutefois impressionnant.

von der Bibel verpflichtet fühlen, die erlaubt, dass in ihr Gottes transformierende Stimme heute in Kirche und Welt vernehmbar ist. Die Inhalte werden hier skizziert und mit einigen kritischen Beobachtungen ergänzt. Die Schlussfolgerung lautet, dass die Summe der Teile größer als das Ganze, aber dennoch beeindruckend ist.

that seems appended to that phase of the book. There are two 'Catholic' contributions from Mary Healy and Peter Williamson. Re-thinking history is what goes on in the next six essays, while the last four—Möller, Seitz, Neil MacDonald and Stephen Wright seem a little more miscellaneous.

In the introduction Bartholomew claims that the bible tells us a story from creation to new creation. There is also a story of historical criticism from early modernity to today. M. Sternberg as the doyen of literary approaches to the bible nevertheless wanted to hold on to the historiographical intentionality of the bible writers. The postmodern turn is invoked: can history really represent the

past? Again a Jewish scholar, this time Jon Levenson is invoked. *However there is no mention of New historicism.*

Plantinga in a version of Ch12 of his *Warranted Christian Belief* argues that at a level of historical probability that the apostles wrote volumes of divine discourse is only 'fairly likely'. (22) 'HBC is fundamentally an enlightenment project; it is an effort to determine from the standpoint of reason alone what the Scriptural teachings are and whether they are true.' (27) This works both on the composition and on the historical background to the text. HBC is guided by the Troeltschian notions of methodological doubt, analogy and correlation, and maybe also, autonomy. These all combine to throw suspicion on any idea that God might intervene in the world. [There is a curious excursus on Victorian doubt and the Ethics of Belief (cf. W.K. Clifford).] On the one hand sceptical scholars conspire to form a consensus around the Troeltschian principles but disagree with each other and until they manage to agree there is no need to worry. These are good reasons, thinks Plantinga, for a believer to disregard HBC.

Plantinga rightly chides those who would exclude Christian scholarship on the grounds of pluralism. He is right to criticise many of the 'experts' for standing as priests and experts in the law. *But Troeltsch is not accepted by the majority of Christian exegetes.* Plantinga tells us we can perhaps build on what is acceptable to everybody, yet thinks that we can know things that nobody else knows because we were 'in the right place'. *Unfortunately I cannot share Plantinga's view that uneducated people are less deistic in their thinking than theological and biblical 'experts' and his account of biblical criticism is an unfortunate caricature.*

Bartholomew himself takes on Philip Davies, even if that is a bit like Richard Dawkins choosing Christian fundamentalists as dialogue partners. For Davies academic study of the bible must be etic and inclusive, not emic and confessional. Bartholomew agrees with Plantinga that 'a real live Scripture scholar is unlikely to have spent a great deal of thought on the epistemological foundations of the discipline.' (63) *This seems unfair to the likes of N.T. Wright.* With Plantinga belief can indeed be 'properly basic'. Bartholomew notes an alliance with Barthian anti-natural theological foundationalism. He seems quite taken with Plantinga and his philosophical big guns.

He senses a need for a theology of history (a note echoed elsewhere in this series.) Why needn't

a theist believe that God have spoken the commandments audibly? We can't found our belief in resurrection on hard evidence.

Robert Gordon wants to offer some defence of HBC: it helps explain why Genesis 1 has animals created before humans and Gen 2 has the reverse. HBC cannot prove the resurrection, but it might be able to show that the belief is present on all layers of the NT. (85) HBC rightly warns us off 'Chritomnism' in the treatment of the OT and, after all, 'some of the impetus for HBC comes from the bible itself.' These questions come from 'what Scripture does to Scripture' It is a non-Troeltschian historical investigation that Gordon proposes, something Calvin would have used. For Plantinga it is either TBC or HBC; there is no middle ground and to do HBC means to leave 'what you think you know by way of faith.' (94) Gordon adds that God's being the author of a prophecy fulfilled in the NT does not mean he is author of the bible. (99)

If a believer can see that critical studies do not undermine the reliability of the NT then one can ignore them. Yet, for Plantinga here is 'no reason for me to think that critical studies have established any important thesis about the New Testament.' (128) The same goes for philosophers – one does not need them to practice a religion. *But that is hardly the point. This series is about Scripture and Hermeneutics, not how to be a faithful Christian.*

Colin Greene writes that if it was good enough for the church through the ages that the gospels were reliable, then why not for us too. *There then follows a fairly wild interpretation of Heidegger as some eschatological prophet and the dubious assertion:* 'In reality the New Testament is a public proclamation of the *kyrios*, which was raised from the dead. Its authority is not located in the historicity of the events it describes but in the eschaton that has already been thrust upon me.' (13)

*Thank goodness for Robert Gordon and especially Joel Green.* Breytenbach's research establishes the verisimilitude but not the verity of Acts 13-14. Historical enquiry is needed to see and show how God has intervened. But narratives are those things which shape a people's identity, they are about 'assigning meaning to the events that have been fulfilled among us'. (149) Writing with some debt to Albert Cook's *History/Writing*, Green argues that Luke's screening of materials is not purely agenda-driven, if we can accept that he sought to be fair and honest. *Perhaps it is not adequate to focus on the integrity rather than the accuracy or intention of the writers.* William Alston's attack on the use of

the ‘criterion of dissimilarity’ is not without merit, but seems totally unaware of how this criterion has been developed and challenged beyond recognition, as discussed in Gerd Theissen’s work. Mary Healy’s essay is informative without being all that stimulating. Peter Williamson does a similar thing in more detail while telling the story about the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which seemed to be alive to methods such as that of Paul Ricoeur’s *lecture*. Williamson thinks that historical criticism is to be valued *if* it is shorn of its concomitant presuppositions; the ‘Jesus of history’ and the ‘Christ of faith’ should not be separated as they were in Bultmann (Cardinal Ratzinger’s chief bogeyman.) He then registers the important point that has become a rallying flag for orthodox of all persuasions in recent years: ‘While Christian faith is open to considering and learning from new historical data, faith is governed by the presentation of Jesus and his message expressed in the canonical texts. Catholic exegesis grounds its knowledge of God’s action in human history in Jesus Christ on the testimony of Scripture and tradition, which it has accepted, rather than on historical research. This is because, in the last analysis, Christian exegesis is a theological rather than a historical discipline, whose ultimate foundation is revelation and faith rather than historical research.’ (208)

Williamson shows how the literal sense is ‘that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors’ (no mention of authorial intention) and that this ‘literal sense of some texts possesses a *dynamic* aspect.’ (215) There is a sense that PBC did not go far enough in condemning wrong presuppositions and wrong use of the method and the likes of John Collins go on believing that HC is neutral while a confessional approach is not. The passage from Rankean empiricism which still left room for divine causality, to a Comtean positivism, which did not, to the Droysen-Dilthey-Gadamer idea of history-writing as a conversation with the past in the light of a life-tradition – all this is well sketched by Iain Provan. ‘Whatever the value of archaeology, then, in filling out our picture of the past, we repeat: history is *fundamentally* openness to acceptance of accounts of the past that enshrine other people’s memories.’ (249) He rejects Collingwood’s model of the historian as a lone-ranger not wanting to rely on the testimony of others. There is a long and useful section on the OT histories of Thompson and Grabbe as privileging the ANE accounts over the bible, as though the former were more ‘balanced’ in their reporting, and concludes

by echoing Halpern’s claim that history can only be based on testimony and not predictability: ‘history is the telling and retelling of unverifiable stories’. (263)

Murray Rae observes the delight, common in both modern and postmodern historians, in disengagement. Spinoza despised the use of biblical narratives or any narratives in order to understand the eternal which is learned from reflection on self-evident axioms. Jewish and Christian faiths were thus historicised and seen as myths. With Vico history did not have a purpose, only an inner necessity. Lessing wrongly equated our distance from the past in terms of experience with that in terms of knowledge (274) and the latter might do especially if we follow Gadamer; Lessing was demanding too much certainty to take the step of commitment. Troeltsch did make history a means to an end, that of a ‘dogma other than that of orthodox Christian faith’. (279) In the bible a fictionalizing tendency is subordinate to historical reference, as Francis Watson has said. Creation out of nothing means that creation is temporal. The purpose of history may also exceed our expectations, and a belief in history implies one in human accountability (so, Derrida). The history of Israel starts with Abraham who does not descend from heaven, like a mythical figure (*presumably it is also important that Jesus had a history in his early life, etc.*) But his was a particular life that had universal significance; and so too might ours. This is a masterly essay. *What I cannot quite understand is why Walter Sundberg is allowed to have another go at the same subject: Kierkegaard for him can be used as an antidote to Lessing. This is not a bad attempt but one feels it covers the same ground as Rae, only less well.*

One smiles when one reads the disarming comment of C. Stephen Evans (321): his full defence (*The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) of the church’s classic way of reading the NT as history ‘has not called for the critical notice of any kind: it has simply been ignored.’ (321) His point is to argue that a common starting point for reading Scripture can be discerned, even where the ensuing interpreters differ in their results. He speaks of the Rule of faith as the content of the main creeds as defined by the ‘early’ ecumenical councils or (cutely) CS Lewis’s ‘mere Christianity’ which is ‘more like a hallway or common room that various churches share.’ (324) Quoting from his earlier monograph mentioned just above: ‘The history of New Testament interpretation strongly sug-

gests that the New Testament under-determines its own interpretation.?(325) With a nod to Stephen Davis, the credal lenses are provided by the Scriptures themselves; they are not alien to the Christian faith. And we certainly don't have to approach the evidence to establish faith without faith, as Swinburne would do. The Scriptures for the non-evidentialist account do not provide evidence for faith to rest on but 'are part of the means whereby God creates faith in those who come to know "the great things of the gospel".' (333) In Plantingan terms, if there is a 'ground' then it is the circumstances in which God creates faith, and that includes the Church

For Greg Laughery, in a fine, well-researched article, Ricoeur in a postmodern climate can be feted as a hero for his insistence on the historical in the bible – it is a public truth touching the real world. Trace, testimony and *représentance* matter to him. There is a useful deployment of Ricoeur's late work *La Memoire, L'Histoire, L'Oubli*, especially in his tussle with the 'postmodernist' Hayden White.

David Lyle Jeffrey shows how the Aeneid's metanarrative was linear in a way that the Odyssey was circular; it was more about destiny than self-discovery. He likes Tom Wright's notion that the Christians metanarrative is public truth and not about a God rescuing people *out* of the world, and heartily agrees with most of the project, but wants to issue a caveat.

'I am less sure than he is that the pilgrim journey to which Galatians and Hebrews invited its Christian readers is not, after all, toward a celestial, rather than a restored earthly Jerusalem... There is a strong hermeneutical sense in which Hebrews is a recapitulation of Galatians.' (378) The two letters get slight treatment by Wright. One should not allow to think that our destination is not beyond history.

*(One wonders just why Tom Wright was not invited to receive the treatment O'Donovan got in Volume III., although the essay by Bartholomew and Goheen in Volume 5 goes a long way) Lyle Jeffrey is rarely anything but stimulating and here he does not disappoint as he tells us: Don't be bewitched by history!*

Möller's article is deep and technical but there is just a sense that it is just too much an introduction into recent scholarship on the 12 prophets without really that much hermeneutical considerations – these are more anecdotal – e.g. Lohfink's attack on 'pan-deuteronomism'. How different is the concept '*Fortschreibung*' from the Childsian 'aggiorna-

mento'?

Seitz comments on Von Rad's inability to go beyond P and J to the final form. Rosenzweig's Rabbenu-Redactor could have been fitted in with the collation of the witnesses by Christ. The canonical approach can now be taken beyond Childs' final form of each book – approach to consider the history and the theology of how sections of the Tanakh came together. 'Jonah' is viewed by Seitz as taking a special place in the Twelve, but a place that is on the way to Nahum. Exegetical insights jump out at many corners and the sense one has is of something fresh and alive. Neil MacDonald stresses, what he part-learned from Childs, the 'ontic priority' of the early chapters of Genesis. God created and acted in the world 'by respectively determining himself to be the creator of and actor in it' (489)

Volume V is titled *Out of Egypt* (2006). This title comes from one of the trickier verses for biblical theology, that of Hosea 1:11 which gets 'mis-quoted' in Matthew 2:15.

Bartholomew asks: What about Childs' seeming indifference to matters of historicity: is this anti-foundationalist? Perhaps, he thinks. Gerald Bray then makes the point that the fathers produced an account of biblical ontology since creation was central. *However the necessity for this seems denied by many of the articles which follow!*

The account of Charles Scobie's *Biblical Theology* by Karl Möller (who writes marvellous English) is largely positive except for a suspicion that the categories of organisation might not always come from the bible itself. The fact remains that much of what Scobie does is intellectually underpowered in a way that gives Biblical theology a bad name. But Möller thinks that to be true to the bible, theology should have a narrational rather than a theoretical character, as McGrath and Goldingay concur. *But first, is the bible fundamentally narrative anyway and second, is it really the case that theology is too often guilty of describing 'states of affairs'? There is a footnote on p59 referencing Oswald Bayer but it is not clear that Bayer is not actually contradicting Möller's case by looking for a poetological ontology. By the way, why does Scobie in quoting George Herbert put [sic] after 'the constellation of the storie [sic]? Does he think that Herbert didn't know to spell?*

Möller is anxious lest biblical theology, forgetting its 'second-order role' take the place of the bible in the church and try to be too ordered, and it should be more like a map for navigating the biblical landscape. *I'm not sure about this metaphor.*

*Just what is the landscape to which the bible is the map?* In any case the preaching of the church need not tame the bible.

Francis Martin does well to point to Romans 12:3 for the origins of the idea of 'the Rule of Faith' and the 'analogy of faith' in 12:6. It is slightly confusing when he invokes the writer François Martin (no relation!) *The Husserlian approach's benefits (learned from Robert Sokolowski) are not very adequately brought out. Indeed I am not sure this essay fits well into this particular volume, as it is more about hermeneutics than biblical theology.* It is great to have an introduction to Marco Nobile's Italian OT theology and the controversial Bonhoefferian *bon mot*: 'whoever wants to be and to feel too soon and too directly in a New Testament way, for me is not a Christian' (92), a text introduced by Erich Zenger (the essay 'Zum Versuch einer neuen jüdisch-christlichen Bibelhermeneutik', in *ThRev* 90 (1994), 274-78 is significant.) Institutions are founded by theophany and struggle – this is interesting but it seems to serve some parts of Genesis and Ezekiel better than other. Nobile appears to have laid out the two different hermeneutics to the same bible and concluded that the Christian one is fuller, better – always a difficulty with a 'Rahnerian' approach', while we are called now to hear the Logos in the OT together as Christians and Jews. (98)

Chris Wright joins in a theme which has been serving almost as a biblical theology for the likes of E.. Schnabel and C.Stenschke; moving Christians from grasping 'the biblical basis of mission' on to 'the missional basis of the bible' (103). Mission, perhaps even more than 'God' is what the bible is all about. One might also call it recovering an eschatological reading, based on the reality of God as 'missionary as implying his authority to the ends of the earth and what he wants do with the church, moving on from messianic to missional hermeneutic. *Wright's essay is a fine piece, inspired by the idea of God's self-sending into which the church must step.* He concludes by observing that any hermeneutical framework will always distort the ground of Scripture and not include everything.

James Dunn has re-issued the English original of the 1995 contribution to the Dohmen/Söding book (which does not get listed in the biography, but presumably is *Eine Bibel-Zwei Testamente*. There is a lot of sense and the asking of good questions, but it seems a bit dated and does not advance things much. Richard Bauckham's searching critique of St Andrews colleague Nathan Mac-

Donald's dissertation, with help from Gnuse, De Moor and Sawyer and the a number of pages on Monotheism in the NT is all interesting if a bit overdone. MacDonald's wish to preserve Deuteronomy from the covering of an 'enlightenment construct' is admired yet challenged in its key claim that 'Deuteronomy does not deny the existence of other gods. I have heard W.Moberly (MacDonald's *Doktorvater*) interpret the *shema* in a similar way, as to do with YHWH's *uniqueness*. The point seems to be that YHWH means business in a unique way. Bauckham thinks this underestimates his objective uniqueness, 'even independently of Israel'.(193). This comes after some exegesis which would suggest that ontologically YHWH is in a class of his own. Having shown the need for biblical scholars to take more time on theological conceptual analysis, Bauckham goes on to demand a biblical-theological account of these texts in the light of other OT texts (canonical context) and these texts as informed by a history of religions account. 'As in the case of the historical Jesus, I would be reluctant simply to let history and theology go their separate ways...' (198). De Moor's more conservative proposal (exclusive *El* worship among proto-Israelites as the origin of monotheism) is preferred.

Stephen Barton writes that the belief in the unity of humankind is predicated on that in the unity of God: 'the unity of humankind is, theologically speaking, a matter of revelation: it comes to us as gift. It is an invitation to share in the life of the God who is One.'(256) Peace for the nations requires communion in the church as a link between Christ and the Spirit and the world, while being self-aware about tendencies. I warm to the sensibility of Barton here, but wish for a bit more clarity.

The less clarity, the more need for hermeneutics to stretch to show how, in this case Zechariah 14 ('*obscurissimus liber*' – Jerome) can be made to relate to the rest of Scripture, or, to be precise, as Al Wolters puts it, 'its relationship to the grand narrative of Scripture as a whole.' (263) To aid this we get Theodore (grammar and non-Christological typology) setting up Zerubbabel vs Gog, and the Maccabees vs Antiochus; then there is Didymus (spiritual interpretation which takes words and finds other passages where they can speak of impeccably orthodox theological truths); and finally Jerome who sees the purpose of prophecies to be Christ and the Church. *Wolters judgment that Jerome too fails to see the historical reference of this prophecy fully enough and resorts to allegory, seems a*

*bit unfair.* Then there are modern commentators who are nevertheless open to Zechariah's fulfilment beyond OT times (Unger the premillennial dispensationalist, van der Woude's general pastoral application of the principles Zechariah is expounding, E. Achtemeier's emphasis on an eschatology inaugurated with Christ's resurrection). There is a wise point learned from Theodore 'that the use of figurative language does not somehow compromise the ability to tell the truth about historical states of affairs.' (284) There is also the possibility of multiple fulfilments of prophecy. *This is a nice study in the history of exegesis.*

William Dumbrell's essay is long and painstakingly exegetical but not especially ground-breaking research. It all serves a conclusion, arrived at by other authors here, that Christians are no longer under the law of Moses and that while biblical exegesis needs to know biblical theology, 'this latter is itself an understanding of the progressive implementation of God's purposes through history.' (310)

Andrew Lincoln observes how the new sense of the use of the bible in the church and the general interest in reception and interpretation in literary theory has encouraged theological readings of the bible. He then moves immediately to Hebrews. This author saw his task as primarily pastoral application of the OT in his communication of scriptural truth to his audience. The writing of Hebrews as creative is informed also by a philosophy of Jewish temporal and Greek vertical eschatologies. It recognises that the new in Christ remodels what OT Scripture means, while of course the OT gives us an authoritative interpretation of this new thing. Preachers should preach OT and NT texts together more than they do. *So far, so good, although we might hear warning bells ringing in the stress on the 'contingency of Hebrews'. The controversial moment comes three pages from the end,* at p333. 'If Hebrews can relativise and critique parts of its authoritative Scriptures in the light of what has happened in Christ (see above), should not any biblical theology that adopts its approach be prepared to critique and relativise parts of its Scriptures-including now, of course, the New Testament, in the light of its central confession about the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus?' It is (as a justifying footnote explains) about judging the bible by the standard of Christ, not a new one of our own, but that fulfilment in Christ's 'not-yet-ness' allows room in the Spirit for doing some of that fulfilling! 'It also entails that the fulfilment in

Christ has both an 'already' and a 'not yet' aspect and that the specific implications of this for later settings remain to be worked out by responsible interpreters under the guidance of the Spirit.' *That will include a criticism of Hebrews for giving hostages to fortune (or the history of interpretation) in its over-readiness to claim the finality of Christ and not just his fulfilment which was roughly simultaneous with a Jewish 'supercessionism' regarding the OT (from cult to synagogue).*

Trevor Hart nicely draws attention to how Karl Barth re-worked his doctrine of baptism in the light of NT evidence and provided a systematic yet 'open-textured' and even open-ended, provisional theology with plenty of 'eschatological reservation'. Systematic theology, as it tilts at the issues of the day need to kept honest by a biblical theology which works from the bible's agenda. While of course it would be hermeneutically naïve to conceive this as a two-step movement of first, a descriptive biblical theology, then a normative systematics. But the latter has the task of making sense of Scripture for our place in culture.

John Webster writes on the clarity of Scripture with special attention in the small-print section to Luther, Zwingli and especially Bullinger with his controlling notion of 'the history of the proceeding of the Word of God.' Inspiration takes place in the divine use of human authors and their speech to become sanctified or holy. The texts have an ontology, 'they have a measure of durability and resistance and can be spoken of in se. They are more than a score for performance, much more than an empty space for readerly poetics.' (366) It is a unique communicative action, one that does not belong to general hermeneutics. Clarity with the help of the Spirit serves efficacy as scripture gets caught up in God's revelation and a communicative presence; but it is the words themselves which receive that clarity as God uses them.

Rusty Reno shows how the patristic-era exegetes like Origen and Chrysostom did not feel they had to *explain* scripture and draw out abstract lessons from it. For Reno it is Protestantism's fault for being less than detailed whereas Chrysostom refers the text to the Christian practice of prayer, reflection on the liturgy. 'To my mind, the distance between the literal sense and theological abstractions is the single greatest failure of earnest and well-meaning attempts by modern exegetes of the NT to produce theological exegesis.' (391f). So it is better when Roy Harrisville on Romans 8:26 uses the phrase 'cruciform life' rather than 'redemption'

or 'eschatological'. It means using the plain sense of the text to allow Nicene personal Trinitarianism to shine through. Reno mocks Brueggemann's phrase: 'it is human agency in the service of Yahweh's solidarity with Israel.' (395) This should be contrasted with the example of Gregory of Nyssa, who, on Exodus 'does not draw away for the semantic particularity of Exodus.' (396). Theology is not a result but a method of exegesis. Reno even takes issue with Childs' following the sign's witness to the *res*. 'Childs assumes that true theology must move from 'description' of what the text says to 'analysis' of its subject matter, and this subject matter is formulated with the abstracted and scripturally thin concepts that characterize so much unsuccessful theological exegesis.' (399) Childs is more concerned with the biblical view of justification rather than how to reconcile Galatians with Leviticus. *This is a very worthwhile and stimulating paper.*

In Stephen Chapman's 'Imaginative Readings of Scripture and Theological Interpretation', the author fears that there is too much subjectivity and too little intellectual rigour in recent approaches which try to make Scripture sound meaningful. The Church fathers were right that for understanding and being touched, study is required. Imagination is good if it helps us stick closer to the text, but not if it would stand in its way. It must be like Bach using Ernesti yet then using his own music to touch the present, or the preacher using historical criticism in *Moby Dick* only to rise above it. *I fear he misrepresents L.T. Johnson on p433, unless Johnson is saying that the lack of mutual need of historical reconstruction and theology is mutual.* Chapman likes Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: 'if the theological interpretation of Scripture is to find a receptive audience – if it is to touch hearts as well as minds – it will need to be just as direct, every bit as imaginative, and similarly sly.' (441) *Yet how does this accord with 2 Cor 4:2 about non-sly communication of the gospel?*

Charles Scobie outlines three stages of biblical interpretation in preaching: Historical context – canonical context – hearers of the sermon. The work at the 2nd stage can overcome the damage done at the first and form the agenda for the third.

## Vol VI: Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation (2006)

I consider myself ill-qualified to evaluate a book

born out of Lukan scholarship so I shall confine myself to what I see to be a few important features:

There is an introductory essay by Tony Thiselton which works more as a response or vote of thanks to the papers. In passing he makes his point (in criticism of the early volumes of the Blackwell series 'Reception history is not simply a description of any or every example drawn from a history of interpretation.' (42) *By this I think he means that Jauss was more interested in the performances and discontinuities, but I would argue that this is exactly what the Blackwell series is interested in!*

Scott Spencer complains about the traditional bracketing out of theology from NT Introductions, and despite Wenham's concern that there has been an over-reaction, thinks that no establishing that Luke was an eye-witness makes his account 'objective'. Spencer wants to insist on the importance of God and the Holy Spirit for Luke. Spencer thinks it is important not to be distracted by possible historical influences on the text as Luke wrote it, but should follow the text 'informed by the principal symbolic 'scenarios' structuring Lukan society (not events, but more Neyrey's codes, relations, boundaries.) Yet he only gives us one short paragraph of how this sheds light on theological matters: to understand God as Heavenly Patron, Honored Patriarch and Holy of Holies) and the resonance between Christ's suffering status and that of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:33-35 (*although why the eunuch should be regarded as 'suffering' seems like eisegesis to me.*)

David Moessner tells us that Luke's Gospel, as all books of the Hellenistic era, is complete in itself with a *diegesis* in which meaning was conveyed by arrangement, and so the significance of Jesus' death as the saving event is not lost by seeing it as only a mid-point stage in the whole of Luke-Acts.

Jesus' parables about money are not about money according to John Nolland, pace David Holgate. This is affirmed and then qualified by Stephen Wright on account of the realism of the parable; it is about people first, though not about wealth and possessions, narrowly conceived. It is more than just a simile – it is a story whose details are to move us ethically

Wright skilfully manages to build on Nolland's essay and take it further: 'the primary way in which this parable works is by inviting its hearers into a realistic world so as to motivate and inspire a readjustment of their own vision of the world and their behaviour within it, rather than by 'revealing'



or 'arguing' something about God...' (223) For Luke in turn, the parables function as 'the gospel in miniature' Ricoeur's dialectic of intention and exteriorization of the text is the hermeneutic Wright prefers, in this valuable essay. Canonically we should expect to understand the parable better than Luke, though the implication is that Jesus is bigger than all meanings.

Max Turner, building on years of scholarly endeavour, judiciously concludes: 'Luke does not *explicitly* connect the Spirit with the broader soteriological functions which John and Paul elucidate. But his broad, dynamic, individual and corporate, highly experiential view of the 'salvation' of God accomplished in Acts *demand*s an explanation as to what immanent power of God could achieve such a result.' (287) The early Dunn was simply wrong to think that only Jesus and not the disciples through his presence had this experience, but the experience of the Spirit is an experience of God and therefore salvific, not just a *donum superadditum*.

I don't find the 'theological' chapters by Hahn, Scobie and Bartholomew/Holt quite so illuminating, but that might be my loss.

It is welcome that there are three chapters at the end on the Reception of Luke's Gospel. For some reason the great F. Bovon refers to Andrew Gregory's work in the 2nd century but wants to go further: the allegorical Gnostic interpretations ('a source for authors wishing to create new stories') were responded to by the orthodox ('commentators to interpret and explain') and Luke was to be read as part of a fourfold gospel (396). Gregory himself in a responding essay underscores this last point to show how the 2nd-century church was clear where the traditions about Jesus had become enscripturated. The canonical gospels are 'authoritative witness to the world behind the text', where Jesus is to be found 'and that a Christian reading of Luke must treat it as pointing to something behind its text rather than as an end in itself.' (410) Gregory nicely points to the importance of the oral 'living' tradition and that of the canonical gospels, although in his contention that the resurrected Jesus is not the same Jesus as 'the historical Jesus', despite there being some continuity, in saying 'there is continuity between Jesus born of Mary and Jesus who was raised from the dead and remains alive today, but the two are not the same, and neither is identical to the historical Jesus whose life and teachings historians seek to reconstruct today', *he seems to confuse that which is reconstructed with that which the resurrected Jesus implies – that is no adop-*

*tionist 'Son of God come lately' but a pre-existent Son of God in the womb of Mary to the cross and beyond.*

Joel Green's 'Afterword' informs us that we have lost the literal sense in a variety of opinions as to what that might be. The canonical approach demands putting Acts after John, not so that 'Luke-Acts' nexus is ignored but that it is not absolutised. Green actually sees much mileage in 'Luke-Acts' and nicely writes: 'Given the way the third evangelist has written the story of Jesus into the story of the Septuagint, the way he has written the story of the early church into the story of Jesus, and the way he has reached an end to this narrative without bringing closure to the story of the actualization of God's purpose in history may provide us with clues as to how best to read canonically in this way.' (441). More generally with N.T. Wright he calls for a theology of history to be attempted. Yet of course there are still theological questions about the significance, such that 'the essential truth-claim lies above all in the claim of this narrative to interpret reality in the light of God's self-disclosure of God's own character and purpose working itself out in the cosmos and on the plain of human events.' (443) A rule of faith demands doctrinal orthodoxy but also Christian orthopraxy in reading Scripture, and to that end looking at the history of impact of embodiment is welcome. We are to make full disclosure of our methodological commitments while preparing ourselves to listen and yield to the text. Also Eco has shown Green how meaning is plural though not limitless, and Green (448) shows that a theological reading of Scripture has the text in final form and as a whole, with a recognition of the cultural embeddedness of text, the canonical address and the witness of Scripture seen in its effects in the church, doctrinal formulations included.

## Vol VII: Canon and Biblical Interpretation (2007)

By volumes 6 and 7 Tony Thiselton has stepped in to the breach in contributing the Introductions. Thiselton may be wrong to see too easy alliances between Childs and James Sanders (canon formation according to the need of the communities) or Walter Moberly (a canonical 'way of reading'). To what extent can it really be said (7) that Childs's Exodus commentary anticipates Jaussian reception history according to which: 'The literal sense is not merely the semantic or linguistic level of meaning alone, but an *actualisation* of the text for each successive generation of the community of faith based

on the linguistic meaning in its canonical context? *For Childs surely the reality lies between text and res as one which is the active partner.* As Thiselton reports Seitz, it is about text and *truth* while allowing both to surprise us, to take the initiative. Thiselton is honest enough to admit he has not been able to read Chapman, Chris Wright and Stephen Dempster. He does well to warn the reader that Lemcio's 'Gospels good and theocentric/ Paulines bad and Christocentric' is at best *übertrieben*. Thiselton as a hermeneutic makes sure in his concluding comment to remind us that plurality of interpretations need not mean Babel or incoherence, but that Bakhtin-like, it leads us from one frequency into the fullness of the rainbow (my metaphor!)

Childs' essay (already published in *Pro Ecclesia* 2005) begins with an outline of the theological bankruptcy of the use of the canon idea in Anglo-Saxon circles and ends with a discussion of German scholarship. There is a reference to the important essay by Söding in *Th Rev* 2003 where he worries about Dohmen's tendency to miss out the realities by too much attention to author, text and reader. The 'new Germans' (mostly Catholic with Janowski, Rendtorff and Oeming also mentioned) have been interested in theology, church and the canon (not merely its formation) as well as Jewish reading. Yet perhaps attention to hermeneutics does not guarantee a theological reading, especially one which would pay attention to Christology and judgement, and using the canonical approach as one hermeneutic for reception amongst others just will not do.

Chris Seitz echoes this point when he writes: 'The area calling out for greatest clarity, at least in the guild of biblical scholarship, is just what is meant by the turn to *theological interpretation*.' (104) One is reminded of the words of Jesus: 'we piped but you did not dance'. There is pressure from the plain sense and not just the odd proof text towards 'finding the Trinity therein'. The text is our 'adversary' as other, its wildness in its overweeningness, as we struggle to make these connections. Seitz insists on the text of the OT being something akin to that of the Hebrew bible since it is something the Church has *received*. There might be some unclarity about where canonical closing stood at the time of the NT: was it two-part, three-part or four-part?(96) Seitz makes the point that for the LXX to count, Augustine had to defend a theory of *inspired* translation. Last he takes aim at the speech-act theory as being too abstract and dehistoricising and also at Richard Hays's project for

allowing the NT to swallow the OT.

Farkasfalvy's essay is a sound and cogent account of how in the second century the four-fold gospel stopped a Marcionite reduction of Christianity to an idea. E. Lemcio re-visits the ground for which he finds few dialogue partners, that the four Gospels need to be the major partner in our theology of and from the NT: it isn't, e.g. all about Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact Jesus's death was not all that significant. What did matter was his manifesting the Father to the world. It gets bolder on p138: 'He was not sent in order to die. Neither his death nor resurrection achieved anything.... This prophetic calling tends to be obscured when the richly textures text is overlaid and flattened by a royal or messianic Christology, as Croatto has recently argued.' (141)

Stephen Evans' essay is about whether the question of pseudonymity matters very much. But he thinks 2 Peter was by Peter, just as all the NT books were written by those who thought of themselves as apostles. Kierkegaard gives him a clue here.

Stephen Chapman argues for a canonical view of inspiration which takes the Incarnational analogy very seriously as has Peter Enns in his *Inspiration and Incarnation. He does not seem aware of James Barr's criticism of Barth's use of the analogy in The Old and New in Interpretation and the agreement of PR Wells on this (James Barr and the Bible)* He admires Vanhoozer for abandoning speech-act theory of inspiration (185) and for coming round to seeing canonization as the providential process of becoming Scripture.

## Vol VIII: The Bible and the University (2007)

*There is to my ear a slight discord in what Bartholomew writes in the preface and William Abraham echoes in his paper: it is all about paying attention to Christ (which all accept) and recovering biblical literacy and seeing these two things as almost the same thing. Are they?* The SAHS project rightly refused to leave faith 'at the door'. Biblical studies has operated 'too much in isolation from the other intellectual disciplines of the university' (Lyle Jeffrey, 2) There is a pronounced dislike of the Humboldtian making the theology department into a self-referential world of its own. What is the alternative? D. Lyle Jeffrey traces the Judeo-Christianizing of Hellenistic culture. (*Extra 's' seem to have crept in to the name of Robert Wilken on p4 and the Latin homines, although that it what my spell-*

*checker wants to do with it too!*) Ricoeur also gets mis-spelled (11). More importantly, is Boethius's Lady Philosophy really Lady Chôkma of the biblical Proverbs, as Lyle Jeffrey claims? As often the angel is in the detail: in what way did Bonventure turn the learning hierarchy of the seven liberal arts around? Was it that they were not to be worked through in order to qualify for theological knowledge, so much as their already receiving theology through the study of creation, even if the arts can be traced back to 'the ultimate sourced of our knowledge, human and divine, namely Scripture as articulated divine Word' (8)? Or in Martianus Capella (not Cappella) 'the predominant riches of the biblical stadium to become a constantly flowing fountain, irrigating all of the other arts.' In other words all knowledge (all discourse?) is Scripture-soaked, even when or perhaps most supremely, when the Bible is explicitly under attack; as in the case of Goethe. Yet he admits that biblical illiteracy is rampant and we need to learn from Mary whose preparation came from reading Scripture (at least in the imagination of the Flemish painter Campin whose depiction of the Annunciation adorns the front cover of the book.) However, there has been a loss of an anchoring central story since Matthew Arnold. 'The problem is that readers so bereft cannot relate any of these imaginative works to a coherent cultural conversation or ongoing dialectic across the disciplines, in which all the major works play a part. To put this in another way: such readers cannot 'see' the degree to which the greatest texts in English literature are already part of a conversation whose dialectical '*in principium*' was a Word from God'. The biblical canon *is* the rule of recognition for all subsequent canons.

Dallas Willard laments the state we are in. The myths which are seen to be behind Christianity as an oppressive institution are replaced by all-knowing secular myths. Yet only Christianity can give the big picture or story and a reason for being 'genuinely good'. The modern university cannot judge between good and evil, whereas 'the good person, on the biblical view, is the person who is permeated by *agape* love.' But in the secular university what belongs to tradition cannot be knowledge (there is a helpful overview of a number of 'why the American education system is literally worthless' e.g. by Marsden and by Reuben), preferring what is challenging and provocative to what is true, with research as a kind of 'social ferment' which promotes arrogance along with the false modesty of something only being 'true for me'. I

think the most useful part of Willard's chapter is his emphasis on the style of the bible as a gentle one and encompassing one, reflecting the character of Christ. 'It does not just state truths and invite us to verify and know them; it uses every possible mode of projection and presentation to draw us into the reality of which it speaks: image, story, art, metaphor, ritual, event, not just *in* the bible, but projected from it into the rich texture of life around it.' (36) Towards the end of this paper, Willard seems to oscillate between claiming all for Christian truth and realising that the latter is not 'scientific knowledge'.

William Abraham contends that there are other resources for the theologians which function as means of grace, soteriologically not epistemologically. The bible as one of these means does not suit what even the best-intentioned biblical scholars tend to do to it. *Incredibly naïve statements are issued along the way*: 'The gospel becomes simply one more option among others rather than being the radical, transforming Word of God.' *It is always nice to have a scapegoat. That biblical studies has cut theology off from its constitutive norm may well be an accurate diagnosis, but how else are we to hear from that norm? Bart Ehrman's loss of faith is seen as the result of wanting too hard to find Christ through the Scriptures when all there is to learn is the variety of opinions about meaning. Rather than give us food for the soul it offers elaborate menus and recipes' (well there are healthy and unhealthy diets.)* Having just blamed theology at p52 he writes that Theology needs to reclaim Scripture. On p53 he deals with Gabler who had the right idea even if he didn't know how to put it into practice. 'Speaking of exegeting the apostles, he confidently notes that "it may be finally established whether all the opinions of every type and sort altogether, are *truly divine*, or rather whether some of them *which have no bearing on salvation*, were left to their own ingenuity.' The key phrase here is "which have no bearing on salvation," a feature of the text which Gabler identifies with the truly divine.' *Abraham seems to think that very few biblical scholars are doing this, or that they would not know what was 'divine', whereas I would imagine that the historically informed exegete is exactly the person to trust for a judgement on what is essential and non-essential in the scriptural message.*

Abraham wants to resist the bible as foundation in the sense of giving us facts, not as providing epistemological lenses. We should forget epistemology whether Scriptural or any other version,

theology should not be a slave to historical investigation or philosophical investigation for that matter. The theologian can affirm the great truths of the faith whatever history is saying. We should think of the canon in a life and wisdom-love giving way. 'Ancillary to this we need to develop a new sub-discipline I theology and philosophy, namely the epistemology of theology, in order to address the issues that first generated the vision of Scripture as a criterion of truth in theology'.

Al Wolters tells us that how we conceive of the relationship of nature and grace will determine how we interpret Scriptures like Proverbs 31 as to what biblical 'fear' means, or 2 Pet 3:18 about the end of the world. His position is *gratia intra naturam* (which he contrasts with three other possibilities, including a caricature of Aquinas's position). Unlike Abraham he is clear that methodology and the getting right thereof through confessing our own philosophical presuppositions is crucial. On his model, biblical scholarship (like 'nature') is to be renewed by the 'grace' of theology' which reminds it of the unity of the bible, or at least the story behind it and helps to explicate certain biblical concepts, such as 'creation as separation': this however looks like the bible shaping philosophy rather than vice-versa. As grace to nature, theology should sit alongside, within other 'sister' disciplines.

With Scott Hahn and Pope Benedict XVI, theology in the bible comes out of a habitat of faith and worship (especially as even in the Platonic Academy) but scientific exegetes seem to ignore that and only wish to reduce it, explain it away. Faith is a legitimate source of knowledge and enquiry. Unless we see that Scripture is the product of the Church then we will not be so ready to interpret it ecclesially. For Benedict the Church is the 'living historical subject' of God's Word (91), or more fully from Spirit of the liturgy, 168, in the footnote: 'the faith of the Church does not exist as an ensemble of texts, rather, the texts-the words-exist because there is a corresponding subject which gives them their basis and their inner coherence. Empirically speaking, the preaching of the apostles called into existence the social organisation "Church" as a kind of historical subject.' There appears to be no felt contradiction in these two sentences; the words are a means to produce the life that is the church; events are the content of the Word. The Church is the place where faith from the past is brought into the present and oriented towards the future (95): theology lives out of the Church's remembrance,

as love seeks understanding. Benedict's *Principles of Catholic theology* witnesses to a high view of Scripture as normative theology. He favours a biblical theology of 'covenant'; this means that the OT is read as shaped crucicentrically so that the bible comes to speak through the liturgy in the eucharistic Mass. *In my view the argument rather loses its way in rhetoric as we come to the end of this account by Hahn. But it is a very useful contribution.* Glenn Olsen's is another Catholic convert who thinks that without a magisterium we will end up with a flux of interpretations; this is against R. Longenecker's view that the only *sensus plenior* allowed is when the NT does this with the OT. *Here there seems a bit of a confusion. When we look at the Church fathers it is not the case that we need to think of post-biblical events fulfilling the OT (Eusebius would be an exception here) but of Origen, Augustine et al thinking that there is fulfilment of the OT in the NT which the NT was not explicit about; the case of whether God was (e.g.) on the side of Joan of Arc does not really concern the fulfilling of prophecy as such.* In any case his point is that the magisterium can stop any claims about events in church history being ridiculous and partisan. He is appreciative of O'Keefe and Reno's 2005 *Sanctified Vision* as to the way in which allegorical readings are not imposing but discovering depth dimensions of the text, but reserved about their pre-modern/modern.

The essays by Robert Roberts and Robert Cochran are about as far as one gets from the flavour of 'Scripture and theology' throughout the whole project. Roberts writing on 'situationism and the NT psychology of the heart' makes use of various experiments in which people's true colours were exposed by being part of a group in response to a crisis or threat. He concludes that it was not just the situation that made 'good' people act strangely badly but that the unvirtuous dispositions were largely already there. Virtue is sometimes skin-deep when not personally chosen in an atmosphere of learning: Nero stopped being the good Stoic when the reason for behaving (his bullying mother Agrippina) died. Christians need to think for themselves and know themselves. A NT psychology offers the hope of transformation, a re-training of the heart in the church, just as Aristotle admitted that one could not hope to be virtuous in a city state that had failed. Cochran on 'the Bible, positive law and the legal academy' argues that power is not necessarily a bad thing (according to O'Donovan's Thomistic notion) and thinks that Christians should try to bring the law

of a state closer to the ideal enunciated by Jesus without becoming so enforcing that it will be too much and become counter-productive. Yet the law should educate and lead to the virtue of Christ, as a good and gentle schoolmaster, presumably. God remains unchanged and people are just as morally hardened as they were in Moses' and Jesus' time, so divorce laws (e.g.) should make such a thing more difficult though not impossible. Christian lawyers will have to go against the grain and the secular elite for whom the First Amendment is appealed to as soon as Christians even try to raise the issue. As Roberts previous essay argued, the myth of the Kantian individual being free to be moral is just that – a myth, but it continues to be a powerful one. He quotes the jurist Blackstone to urge that 'natural law' always needs reinforcement by revealed law and proposes: 'the law should work to protect intermediate institutions and should encourage individuals in society to care for one another.' *I found these two chapters refreshing and instructive.*

I pass over the rather idiosyncratic chapter by David I. Smith which tries to employ Comenius to help us with our method in Christian education. John Sullivan as one of the minority of British-European contributors. He promotes the idea that exegesis works from the inside in sympathy with the text of the community and that interpretation means adjusting and opening one's personal self up to receive the meaning, a sort of ascetic reading. He rejoices in Lesley Smith's challenge to Leclercq's positing of a sharp monastic/scholastic contrast in theological method. He deplores the utilitarianism in the British educational system with instrumental reason replacing contemplative. No Christian institution should over-react by allowing Christian orthodoxy to function as an ideology. (234) He promotes an umbrella which creates an environment congenial to Christian thinking, but also to non-Christian thinking. 'the Christian university prompts a reading of self, scholarship and faith that is generously outward-looking: the life of the mind for the good of the world'. *Yet one wonders if it is only commercialising managerialism that the Christian university has to fear. If it will not act the Christian university in more positive ways, by promoting Christian initiatives, who then will?*

Byron Johnson's essay on biblical literacy in America is full of useful statistics and a conclusion that it is not as low as has been suggested as well as the interesting finding 'Frequent bible readers are far less likely than the average person to have read

*The Da Vinci Code.*' (251)

Roger Lundin's essay tells the story of Emersonian subversion of Scriptural rhetoric (in Thoreau and then Whitman and applauded by Northrop Frye) while Melville and Hawthorne appreciated the darker side of the biblical message as it accorded with how the world truly seemed to be, and Emily Dickinson saw the bible offering 'rich alternatives to the poverty of modern thought' (273) To their questions Lundin offers a renewed Barthian *theologia crucis* as the only way to a theology of resurrection glory.

Stephen Evans 'Afterword' is really a summary of the various essays. It is Lyle Jeffrey who gets to offer the last substantive chapter freedom is only a good if it serves truth and the good of the community). But none of this really works well as a conclusion in the sense of marshalling the voices, although on the very last page (310) Evans does try to leave us with three points out of the tapestry of these essays.

1. In Christian institutions the Christian narrative should define the institution. *Amen!*
2. We must read the bible as a whole and as the Word of God.
3. This is because 'knowing' is a function of the whole person, not just the intellect, and is shaped by communities and practices. This is particularly true for moral and religious knowledge.' *To my mind there is a slight non sequitur here. How does it follow that because knowing is holistic for a person hence the bible should be read as a whole? There are better reasons for reading the bible as a whole.*

## Conclusion

Over these five volumes reviewed above there is a huge amount of material for reflection and discussion. Everyone is given a say to the extent that premature 'general conclusions' are largely avoided. Plaudits to Craig Bartholomew for having the vision and for managing to keep the whole thing together and to Tony Thiselton for acting as a highly competent lieutenant. [www.sahs-info.org](http://www.sahs-info.org) should help us to find out where the project goes after the completion of this series. If anything we can trace a bit of continental drift as the sponsors moved from being the British Society and the project being based in Cheltenham to the involvement of Baylor University and others along with the relocation of the general editor, although the appointment of Thiselton around the time of Volume 5 helped to

keep the British connection. But it has to be seen as a transatlantic project. Nothing wrong with that (except that I feel that the Reformed epistemologists and the Christian literary heritage specialists have other and better places to publish), not least when it brings us (e.g) the voices of Childs and Seitz, Reno and the two Roberts (Cochran and Roberts) in the last volume. Yet something of its usefulness for the European situation might be lost. I say this as one who believes in the internationalism of theology and biblical studies. However I am aware that the currents of influence and engage-

ment are complex ones and it cannot be assumed that the problem of the Enlightenment for faith and the question about the Bible as the Word of God – for that is what this project is all about – is best dealt with while largely ignoring the cultures in which the Enlightenment and its developments and its shaping of biblical theology, for better and for worse, mostly took place. Perhaps there could also have been a slightly stronger editorial control to unify the contributions without extinguishing the fresh creativity which is evident. In this project for all its smorgasbord of riches, the sum of the parts seems greater than the whole.

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