

FRANCES YOUNG

Ways of Reading Scripture

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*

369

Mohr Siebeck

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Ways of Reading Scripture

Collected Papers

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

I am grateful to Markus Bockmuehl for the suggestion that I should gather together publications of mine concerned with the New Testament for the WUNT series. The fact that the publisher was willing to allow me to produce some new papers to include alongside older studies made this project particularly attractive to me. Now well into retirement I had already been thinking I should like to return to some study of the New Testament. May I here record my immense gratitude to all those at Mohr Siebeck who have facilitated the bringing of this collection to print, especially for their patience with unforeseen delays.

In some ways I hardly regard myself as truly a New Testament specialist, though I did teach Greek and New Testament studies throughout my lecturing career. Doing that alongside research in patristics, particularly in patristic exegesis, has constantly raised issues for me about exegesis, doctrine and hermeneutics. This somewhat disparate collection, with its rather all-embracing title, is the fruit of these discrete but overlapping concerns.

This work would never have seen the light of day without the assistance of Rev Josephine Houghton, who typed papers not previously in digital form, and also assisted with the considerable editorial task of making references, abbreviations, etc., consistent across the volume. Thanks are especially due to her, and also to Rev Dr Andrew Teal of Pembroke College, Oxford, for compiling the Indices, with the assistance of his wife, Rachel, and Chris Long.

February 2018

Frances Young

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Koninklijke Brill NV, for ch. 20, "Books and their 'Aura': the Functions of Written Texts in Judaism, Paganism and Christianity during the First Centuries CE," from *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation*, ed. Judith Frishman, Willemien Otten and Gerard Rouwhorst (2004): 535–552.

Louvain Studies, Peeters Publishers, for ch. 9, "John and the Synoptics: An Historical Problem or a Theological Opportunity," Festschrift for Fr Kenneth William Collins, *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008): 208–220.

Oxford University Press, for ch. 7, "Wisdom in the Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament," from *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (2005): 85–104; and from the *Journal of Theological Studies*, ch. 2, "Christological Ideas in the Greek Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JTS* NS20 (1969): 150–162; and ch. 12, "Note on II Cor. 1.17b," *JTS* NS37 (1986): 404–415.

SAGE publications UK, for ch. 16, "The Pastorals and the Ethics of Reading," from *JSNT* 45 (1992): 105–120; ch. 18, "Interpretative Genres and the Inevitability of Pluralism," also from *JSNT* 59 (1995): 93–110; and ch. 19, "Augustine's Hermeneutic and Post-modern Criticism," from *Interpretation* 58 (2004): 42–55.

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ch. 6, “From Analysis to Overlay: A Sacramental Approach to Christology,” from *Christ: The Sacramental Word. Incarnation, sacrament and poetry*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (1996): 40–56; for two chapters from Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (1987), ch. 13, “Paul’s Case for the Defence”: 27–59, and ch. 14, “The Biblical Roots of Paul’s Perceptions”: 60–84; and for ch. 24, “Sacred Text and the Transcendence of Tradition: the Bible in a pluralist society” from *Liberating Texts? Sacred scriptures in Public Life*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim and Jonathan Draper (2008): 75–98.

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Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers, New York: Newman Press
ANCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Edinburgh: T&T Clark
AV	Authorised Version
<i>BCBF</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Catholic Biblical Federation</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, Leuven: Peeters
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i> , Manchester: Manchester University Press
CCL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, Turnhout: Brepols
CIIS	Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Leuven: Peeters
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press
ET	English Translation
FC	Fathers of the Church, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Leipzig: Hinrich; Berlin: Akademie Verlag
GNB	Good News Bible
JB	Jerusalem Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> , Atlanta, GA: SBL
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> , London: Sage Publications UK
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press
LCC	Library of Christian Classics, London: SCM Press
LCL	Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
LXX	Septuagint
NEB	New English Bible
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, New York: Christian Literature Company; Oxford and London: Parker & Company
NS	New Series
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford: Clarendon
PG	Migne, <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , Paris 1857–1866
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien, Berlin: De Gruyter
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

SC	Sources Chrétiennes, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
SNTS	Societas Novum Testamentum Studiorum
SST	Society for the Study of Theology
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel, <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , trans. G. W. Bromiley (ET Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–, German original, 1932–).
TS	Texts and Studies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Biblical books

Note: various translations are cited, including my own.

Gen	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Exod	Exodus	Wis	Wisdom
Lev	Leviticus	Sir	Sirach
Num	Numbers	Matt	Matthew
Deut	Deuteronomy	Rom	Romans
Josh	Joshua	1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel	Gal	Galatians
Ps/Pss	Psalms	Eph	Ephesians
Prov	Proverbs	Phil	Philippians
Isa	Isaiah	Col	Colossians
Jer	Jeremiah	1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
Ezek	Ezekiel	1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Hos	Hosea	Heb	Hebrews
Mic	Micah	Jas	James
Zech	Zechariah		

Other Primary Sources

Aristotle, <i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poetics</i>
Athanasius, <i>Inc.</i>	<i>On the Incarnation</i>
<i>C. Ar.</i>	<i>Orations against the Arians</i>
<i>Decr.</i>	<i>Defence of the Nicene Definition</i>
Athenagoras, <i>Leg.</i>	<i>Embassy for the Christians</i>
Augustine, <i>Doctr. Chr.</i>	<i>Christian Instruction</i>
Barn.	<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>
Cicero, <i>Ep. Quint. Frat.</i>	<i>Letter to his brother Quintus</i>
<i>Nat. d.</i>	<i>De Natura Deorum</i>
1 Clem.	<i>1st Epistle of Clement</i>
Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromateis</i>
Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Comm. Jo.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Comm. Matt.</i>	<i>Commentary on Matthew</i>
Did.	<i>Didache</i>
Eusebius, <i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Praep. ev.</i>	<i>Preparation for the Gospel</i>

<i>Vit. Const.</i>	<i>Life of Constantine</i>
Hag.	Hagigah
Herm. Mand.	Shepherd of Hermas. Mandate(s)
Herm. Sim.	Shepherd of Hermas. Similitude(s)
Herm. Vis.	Shepherd of Hermas. Vision(s)
Horace, <i>Carm.</i>	<i>Odes</i>
Ignatius, <i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Phld.</i>	<i>To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>To Polycarp</i>
<i>Smyrn.</i>	<i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Trall.</i>	<i>To the Trallians</i>
Irenaeus, <i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i>
John Chrysostom, <i>Hom. 2 Cor.</i>	<i>Homilies on 2 Corinthians</i>
<i>Hom. Heb.</i>	<i>Homilies on Hebrews</i>
<i>Hom. Matt.</i>	<i>Homilies on Matthew</i>
Josephus, <i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
Justin, <i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
Lucian, <i>Alex.</i>	<i>Alexander the False-Prophet</i>
<i>Peregr.</i>	<i>The Passing of Peregrinus</i>
Mart. Pol.	The Martyrdom of Polycarp
Origen, <i>Cels.</i>	<i>Against Celsus</i>
<i>Comm. Jo.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Comm. Matt.</i>	<i>Commentary on Matthew</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	<i>First Principles</i>
Ovid, <i>Metam.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
Philo, <i>Confusion</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
<i>Flight</i>	<i>On Flight and Finding</i>
<i>Moses</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses</i>
<i>Planting</i>	<i>On Planting</i>
<i>Q.E.</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Exodus</i>
<i>Q.G.</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
Philostratus, <i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	<i>The Life of Apollonius of Tyana</i>
Plutarch, <i>Alex.</i>	<i>The Life of Alexander</i>
Porphyry, <i>Abst.</i>	<i>On Abstinence</i>
Quintilian, <i>Inst.</i>	<i>The Orator's Education</i>
Tertullian, <i>Herm.</i>	<i>Against Hermogenes</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i>
<i>Prax.</i>	<i>Against Praxeas</i>
Virgil, <i>Ecl.</i>	<i>Eclogues</i>

Introduction

The significance of this book must lie, surely, in the way it exemplifies the extraordinarily interesting changes which have taken place in biblical hermeneutics during the last 50–60 years. It consists of articles and chapters published previously over the course of a career as a scholar of early Christianity, together with a few newly composed additions. The focus is on studies concerned with the New Testament, but in a context of enquiries about methods of interpretation, and of exploration of the nature and function of sacred scriptures, with a slant towards theological and doctrinal reading.

My principal research interest has been patristics, but my teaching activities for over 20 years were focused on the New Testament. The two areas converged somewhat in my work on patristic exegesis, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, which implicitly, though not explicitly, showed up the similarities and differences between ancient and modern interpretation.¹ In 2012 a collection of my patristic essays and papers was published by Ashgate in the Variorum series;² this collection is my response to an offer to collect together my work on the New Testament. Many of the pieces included here draw upon my awareness of a broader range of early Christian texts than just the New Testament. They also display a range of compositional registers, many being accessible to a wider readership than is the case generally in collections of this kind. A few of those selected, however, are more technical articles concerned with Greek vocabulary and sentence construal.³

As in the earlier patristic collection, the process of gathering together previously published material has provided an opportunity for an introductory overview of the work included. It may seem strange to place first in this collection a piece composed at the end rather than the beginning of the author's career. The reason, however, is clear: it provides retrospective light, not only on my own developing thought, but on a major paradigm shift that has affected some, if not

¹ Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

² Frances Young, *Exegesis and Theology in Early Christianity*, Variorum Collected Studies (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

³ This has made it rather challenging to encompass all the articles in one consistent editorial policy, as requested, but in order to do so, the original Greek, transliteration and translation, whether or not such aids appeared in the original publication, have all been provided on the first occasion each word or phrase is used, though not thereafter.

all, biblical scholarship in the past half-century. The collection as a whole reflects changes in approach in both large and small matters: for some readers the lack of so-called inclusive language in the early essays will be all too noticeable, alongside the assumption that original meaning can be distilled from historic texts if you set about it with the right linguistic and historical tools. When I began research, the dominant ethos of New Testament studies was entirely historical, as indeed was the approach to patristic study, geared as it was to tracing the development of doctrine in the first four to five Christian centuries. As postmodernism raised questions about objectivity and textual meaning, both exegesis and doctrine would be approached with rather different perspectives. Chapter 1, “Ways of Reading the Bible,” produced for a predominantly Roman Catholic conference on biblical scholarship, sets out the methodological issues as perceived towards the end of my intellectual journey, while subsequent papers are evidence of various stages along the way.

My initial research at postgraduate level was to be a study of patristic exegesis of Hebrews. From the beginning, however, I was drawn to doctrinal and hermeneutical issues, and this proved a distraction from engagement with the epistle’s exegesis as such. In the end, my doctoral thesis focused on sacrificial ideas in early Christian writings from the New Testament to John Chrysostom, tracing the impact of Greco-Roman and biblical understanding of sacrifice on interpretation of the death of Christ, the eucharist and other aspects of Christian practice in the early church.⁴ An early paper, figuring here as chapter 2, similarly engaged with doctrinal issues, demonstrating as it did the influence on patristic exegesis of Hebrews of fourth-century christological preoccupations. Thus it exemplifies the hermeneutical point made in the opening essay that readers’ interests and questions materially affect the way a text is read – there is no presuppositionless exegesis. It also illustrates a related point that, while many of the same processes are at work in exegesis ancient and modern, differing interests and cultural presuppositions materially affect the outcome. It is, of course, by hindsight that such observations are possible. At the time the exercise was conceived entirely in terms of the historico-critical interest in what people thought back then, and what were the influences upon them.

As indeed were conceived the following two essays in section A, originally published as chapters in the notorious volume, *The Myth of God Incarnate*.⁵ My involvement with that project was consciously driven by the sense that the majority of believers were in some sense docetist in their understanding, unable to take the human, historical Jesus really seriously and innocent of the inevitable implications of a truly historico-critical reading of the New Testament. Its reception did indeed highlight the gap between the scholar and the pew, exacer-

⁴ Published as Frances Young, *Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers*, Patristic Monograph Series (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979).

⁵ John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

bated as reactions were by the mass media, much to my own discomfort. Some 40 years later I am not ashamed to republish my contributions to the volume; they gathered together a whole range of cultural parallels to early Christian claims about Jesus, historical material which was and is routinely discussed among scholars. This gives these chapters a certain perennial usefulness, but there is a further point in their resurrection: from a later perspective they show how profoundly the critical approach challenged traditional Christology, and how inadequate the historico-critical method was for discerning scriptural meaning.

It will be evident by now that I was somewhat preoccupied with Christology in my early researches – hence the focus of section A, which moves from critical and historical approaches to Christology to constructive theological reading. Postmodern questions have enabled a more complex appreciation of the nature of truth and knowledge, a wider perspective on what might constitute meaning, a recognition of the inseparability of fact and interpretation, a deeper readiness to value insight and intuition, multiple meanings, even paradox and ambiguity, and a willingness to value literary criticism as highly as historical analysis. This last move is reflected in chapter 5, entitled “The Mark of the Nails,” which springs from a fundamentally literary question: it argues that, even with the apparent resolution of resurrection, the drama of Jesus’s story is fundamentally tragic. Tragedy exposes the truth, and as tragedy the passion-story becomes “a universal narrative, a story told by an inspired poet, not a mere chronicler or historian.” Furthermore, its atoning power is revealed by its association with tragedy’s origin in cathartic rituals. Thus, the piece exemplifies the point that meaning and truth are found not in facts painstakingly established through historico-critical argument, but through interpretation and insight.

The new intellectual environment also enabled a return to Christology some 20 years later: the outcome appears here as chapter 6. Tackling the view that the Chalcedonian Definition is incoherent, a view espoused by the editor of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, John Hick, it defended, on the one hand, *the analytical approach* of that historic statement as essential to safeguard Christianity from popular tendencies, either to divinize Jesus in ways analogous to pagan mythology, or to give an inadequate account of the Son of God as a mediating confusion of divinity and humanity, neither fully one nor the other; and, on the other hand, in a bid to re-present the identity and significance of Christ as traditionally conceived in Christian theology, it explored *the synthetic thinking* of, particularly but not solely, St Paul. His overlaying of scriptural texts produces, not so much a collage, as “a synthetic whole in which they all penetrate and illuminate one another.” Furthermore, being utterly other, “divine being could be both differentiated from and mystically identified with another being.” Thus, the article implies that neither exegesis nor doctrine need remain trapped in the reductionism of modernity’s critical analyses.

Chapters 7 and 8 from a further ten years on might seem to evidence a reversion to sharply critical methods. Demonstrating that the first incontestable christological use of Proverbs 8:22ff. is to be found in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* in the mid-second century, chapter 7 on "Wisdom in the Apostolic Fathers" makes the case that anachronistic doctrinal reading of the New Testament persists, despite the century and a half of modernity's dismantling of the claims to find Christian doctrine in scripture – indeed this piece of work on wisdom undermined my own use of Wisdom-Christology in earlier papers (chs. 3, 4 and 6), where my assumption had been that Paul, not to mention the author of John's Gospel, had correlated with the pre-existent Christ the personified figure of God's wisdom found in Proverbs 8:22ff. and subsequently in the Deutero-canonical books of Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. The following chapter on "The Gospels and the Development of Doctrine" also uses critical methods to show that the Gospels had little real impact on doctrinal development: indeed, conversely, credal confessions and doctrinal disputes influenced the identification of approved gospel narratives rather than vice versa, and even affected the formation of the gospel texts. Later on proof-texts certainly figured in doctrinal argument, but they were drawn from right across scripture; appeal was not primarily to the gospel texts themselves – which were in any case invariably read in the light of doctrinal interests and often yielded ambiguous answers to the questions in debate. One of those questions arose entirely from the common assumption since Justin that Proverbs 8:22ff. did refer to the pre-existent Christ, an assumption deriving from the second-century impulse to search the prophetic scriptures for clues to identify the Christ-figure. The effect of these two pieces is to demonstrate that critical methods remain key to understanding the profound "otherness" of the reasoning and exegesis which produced classical Christian doctrine. Only by understanding this can we work out how to read scripture Christianly in a totally different intellectual environment, whether modern or postmodern, a point made even clearer by the following article (ch. 9) suggesting we might learn from the Fathers to treat the conundrum of the relationship of John's Gospel to the Synoptics as a theological opportunity rather than a historical problem. Needless to say this brief if suggestive article scarcely begins to work out what that might mean.

Thus, the various essays gathered in section A pose a series of provocative questions about Christology in particular, doctrine in general and, above all, how to read the Gospels Christianly. The newly composed chapter 10 suggests a way to reread the Gospels so as to reread Jesus, both as a historical figure and as the catalyst for Christianity, by being more methodologically open to reading for resonances and to respecting memory as a clue to the impact of Jesus. That Jesus was impelled by a scripture-shaped vocation to live and die for God alone is a conclusion some may regard as too great a concession to traditional Christian belief and a betrayal of critical scholarship. Yet it could be argued that

it is not only true to the gospel texts, but something like this can alone account for the rise of Christian belief, a point perhaps further confirmed by the appendix to this essay: considering the Pauline evidence does, after all, introduce the earliest material we have for assessing Jesus and his impact. This also provides some transition to the following section.

For the essays in section B mostly derive from a period in my career of intense engagement with the interpretation of the Pauline and post-Pauline Epistles. The works gathered here were almost all produced during the research process for two books. The first of these, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, was a joint project with David Ford – a deliberate attempt to build bridges between New Testament criticism and systematic theology.⁶ Key to the book were the hours we spent debating how to translate each phrase and sentence, each paragraph and section of the letter. The outcome demonstrated how much, in matters of exegesis and interpretation, it all depends on what questions you ask of the text. Two of the chapters from my pen are included in this volume as chapters 13 and 14, not least because they presented challenges to the general consensus of New Testament scholarship while equally engaged with the questions concerning Paul's own meaning and intention within his historical context. In the case of these two chapters, as well as the two articles that here precede them (chs. 11 and 12), literary, rhetorical and patristic readings became the genesis of fresh insights into the purpose and context of 2 Corinthians in particular and the Corinthian correspondence in general. One of our important contentions was that 2 Corinthians, as in effect Paul's *apologia pro vita mea*, should provide the best access to what made Paul tick, and the following article (ch. 15 in this collection) was my attempt to test that out by reading the Pauline classic, Romans, in the light of our findings, rather than letting Romans lead the shaping of Pauline theology as it has done predominantly since the Reformation.

The second book project arose from a request to contribute a short volume on *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* to a series focusing, more or less one by one, on the theology of the New Testament writings.⁷ The associated article included as chapter 16 specifically tackled the question how to read appropriately texts generally recognised as pseudonymous. Here the consensus of New Testament historical scholarship was simply accepted as most plausible, and attention focused on the implications of such a conclusion: how were pseudonymous texts to be treated respectfully? How were they to function as scripture? Exploring how to read them ethically drew the discussion into an exploration of the interactions between author, text and reader, anticipating the dynamics traced in chapter 1.

⁶ Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987; republ. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

⁷ Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

The final piece in this section had a different genesis, which explains the curious range of material it covers. Gathering together the “non-Pauline letters,” with the exception of the Johannine epistles, might seem at first an arbitrary project generated solely by the exigencies of covering everything in a volume on biblical interpretation. Intriguingly the result produced far greater coherence than anticipated. For the material covered, Hebrews and the Pastorals, James and the Petrine letters, raised similar questions. All are most likely pseudonymous, all ask us to determine how they relate to Paul, and all seem to pose issues about the next generation, not least about the possibility of various different forms of early Christianity. Other questions raised in common by these diverse little epistles concern (1) the perceptions which they carry of their relationship with Jewish history, together with their interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, (2) their development of a Christian lifestyle, not least in response to persecution, and (3) their warnings against false teaching and search for the true tradition.

If section A explored the “Gospel,” with an eye to the doctrinal significance of the gospel texts, while section B focused on the collected “Apostle,” section C turns to the function and nature of scripture. Function is implied in the first article, which considers the way in which interpretation is affected by the generic context in which it takes place: commentary, homily, theme-study, literary-critical study, church report, sermon, liturgy, hymnography, even systematic theology. The advantages and drawbacks of each context are considered, and the question raised whether we should expect exegesis undertaken in one genre to work effectively in another – indeed, whether we should expect scholarship and preaching to be related as master and slave. A plurality of meanings is perhaps inevitable, depending on what is asked of the text, how it is meant to function. The second piece in section C, commissioned for a journal issue focusing on Augustine, considers the similarities sometimes claimed between Augustine’s theory of signs and postmodern semiotics, highlighting the substantial differences in overall intellectual context, and suggesting not only that those similarities can be overplayed but that Augustine might have something significant to say with respect to certain postmodern trends. The perhaps surprising inclusion of this piece arises from the fact that it provides an overview and critique of postmodern approaches to interpretation, while also showing how Augustine could at once approach the language of scripture with a certain scepticism and insist on the essential truth of scripture. Thus it leads naturally into the following papers in which the very notion of scripture is explored.

What is it after all which distinguishes scripture from other literature? In “Books and their ‘Aura’” this question is raised by exploring the functions of written texts in the Judaism, Paganism and Christianity of antiquity. In general books were venerated in a way we can hardly imagine; for miraculously they carried the wisdom of ancient, inspired and revered seers over generations. For Jews this was enhanced by the affirmation that their sacred books contained the

Word of God. Against this background the Christian attitude to books at first seems surprisingly ambiguous: roughly speaking, authority shifted away from books to Christ as the Word of God, though books provided crucial testimony to that. So, eventually, a canon of authoritative books provided the church with texts functioning as foundation documents, as doctrinal and moral guidebooks, and as a key element in the liturgy, books read and interpreted in homilies, processed with candles and incense, becoming a kind of “icon” or “image” of the divine. Inserted immediately after this discussion is a brief new essay asking the question, “Did Luke think he was writing scripture?” This implicitly highlights those ambiguities associated with the term “scripture,” while at the same time enabling some consideration of the process towards canonization during the second century.

The next pair of articles gives more consideration to the relationship between scripture and doctrine. In the first (ch. 22) ways in which the Fathers sought doctrinal truth through a search for the “mind” of scripture as a whole are contrasted with modern historical readings, and the question is raised how far their doctrinal legacy can remain valid. The suggestion is that systematic theology needs to justify the orthodox doctrine it interprets as an appropriate reading of scripture in our very different intellectual environment. The second turns specifically to the doctrine of the Trinity, avoiding the usual developmental model and asking whether the doctrine does or does not reflect the implications of the New Testament writings. It traces the building up of the trinitarian superstructure through deduction from, and argument about, the scriptural texts, and raises the question whether the result permits a better view of what the New Testament is about. So, through addressing a key example it potentially provides a way of responding to the challenge of the previous piece.

The climax of section C is a piece written in a more popular register and with a far wider horizon, that of contemporary religious pluralism. Telling parallels are drawn between different religious traditions with regard to the cultic meaning and liturgical function of sacred writings, something which lies beyond any quest to read with understanding; while the apparent exclusivity of different, potentially rival, scriptures is challenged by highlighting the way they point to transcendence of sectarian perspectives, the Christian Bible providing a classic example. Thus implicitly the question is raised: how to read scripture as scripture. For in the end that is the real question raised by this whole collection.

So, as a concluding hermeneutical exercise, I return after some 50 years to the exegesis of Hebrews, with which my research career and this collection began, this time seeking to learn something from Hebrews’ own approach to reading its scriptures – what Christians call the “Old Testament.” Two aims shape the enquiry: the first is to discern what Hebrews itself is all about; the second is to discover how to read scripture Christianly and *as scripture*, including Hebrews itself. It turns out that this means reading scripture not just as a collection of

disparate texts from the past, but as a body of text which illuminates the present, text and reader being judged in the light of Christ, and drawn into the dynamics of scriptural living through hearing the Word of God in the context of liturgy. Thus, the essay reads Hebrews, and ultimately scripture, with bifocal vision – one eye on the demands of the academy, another on those of the *ecclesia*.

That scripture is like an inexhaustible fountain was the suggestion of Ephrem Syrus in the fourth century.⁸ This collection of essays demonstrates that the interpreter of scripture cannot expect to come up with one incontestable, universal meaning appropriate to every age and context. Rather the riches of scripture lie in its potential to generate meanings that transform people's lives in a multitude of ways, pointing beyond itself and themselves to the elusive yet revelatory reality of God's love in Christ.

⁸ Ephrem Syrus, *Commentary on the Diatesseron*, 1.18–19, Syriac text: S. Ephrem, *Commentaire de L'Évangile concordant, version arménienne*, ed. and Latin trans. L. Leloir, CSCO 137, 145 (Leuven: Peeters, 1953). See the end of ch. 22 for quotations.

Chapter 1

Ways of Reading the Bible: can we relativize the historico-critical method and rediscover a biblical spirituality?*

In this paper I shall attempt three things. I shall first outline the methods of biblical interpretation that have dominated the modern (as distinct from the past and the postmodern) period, remarking on the value and importance of the so-called *historico-critical* challenge to traditional interpretation, as well as its pitfalls.¹ Secondly I intend to provide comparison and contrast by looking at the methods of interpretation used in the early church, briefly indicating its legacy in the medieval *four senses* of scripture.² I propose, finally, to develop a model of interpretation³ whereby we can hold this together with the historico-critical method, with benefits from both, while defining *lectio divina* against this background, and offering a doctrinal model of Holy Scripture which could undergird this.⁴

So I shall not suggest that we discard the historico-critical method, but rather put it into relation with past approaches so that it can be transcended.

* Originally published in *Reading Scripture for Living the Christian Life*, ed. Bernard Treacy, with Frances M. Young, J. Cecil McCullough and Thomas Brodie (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2009): 7–25.

¹ In this section I will eschew footnotes, since it simply summarizes for the general reader already well-known material.

² In this section I am reproducing and adapting my own work published elsewhere, e.g. “The Rhetorical Schools and their influence on Patristic Exegesis,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 182–199; republished as ch. IV in *Exegesis and Theology*; “Interpretative Genres and the Inevitability of Pluralism,” *JSNT* 59 (1995): 93–110, reproduced as ch. 17 of the present volume; *Biblical Exegesis*; “The Interpretation of Scripture,” in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 24–38. For detailed footnotes these should, for the most part, be consulted.

³ This was originally published as “The Pastorals and the Ethics of Reading,” *JSNT* 45 (1992): 105–120, and is reproduced in ch. 16 of the present volume.

⁴ This has previously been outlined in Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: towards a theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1990).

I. *The historico-critical method*

A number of things contributed to the rise of the modern historico-critical method:

In the fifteenth century the Renaissance and the work of great scholars like Erasmus reminded people that the word of scripture did not come in the Latin of the Vulgate, but rather Greek was the language of the New Testament, and what Christians call the Old Testament was originally in Hebrew. As printing superseded manuscripts, questions about the differences between the handwritten witnesses became significant, and the attempt to find what lay behind these differences, so as to provide printed editions of the pristine, uncontaminated original, became paramount. So one big factor was the drive to get back to the original and pare away all the mistakes and misinterpretations that had accumulated over the centuries.

This has to be important. We all know that we cannot make things mean what we like: we argue over meaning in everyday life, sometimes because we have misheard, sometimes because we have not grasped the point the other person was trying to make; occasionally the person will say, “I said so-and-so but I really meant so-and-so.” In other words language carries meaning, and we cannot arbitrarily attribute meanings to words or sentences which do not fit them. To understand something requires the establishment of exactly what was said in the original language, and that involves acquiring the expertise to do it.

A second factor was the rise of what has been called the *romantic* view of what happens when one reads a text. In the nineteenth century it was famously described as “thinking the author’s thoughts after him.” So primacy was given to authorial intention – the meaning lay in what the author had in mind when he wrote it.

So in reading any text from the ancient world, the Greek and Latin classics as well as the Bible, the first thing was to grapple with the question what was in the author’s mind. In the case of scripture this meant establishing who the author was, with the time or occasion of the writing and how it fitted into the author’s situation and purposes, so as to discern the original meaning. Dating, biographical details, events and relationships would provide clues to authorial intention; so reconstruction of the original situation was fundamental.

This too has to be important. In our everyday arguments about meaning we sometimes find a person saying, “You misunderstand – I was referring to something else.” We certainly will understand what we read better if we know something of the circumstances. Paul provides the most obvious example: he was writing letters to his congregations about all kinds of problems in the churches, and if we can reconstruct what was going on we shall get his point much better.

Then alongside this was the rise of what has been called *historical consciousness*: that is, the sense that back then was not the same as now. Another famous

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