

## Reviews

**TEXT AND TRUTH: REDEFINING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY** by Francis Watson. Edinburgh, 1987, *T & T Clark*, viii + 344 pp., £24.95.

“The real question”, writes Dr Francis Watson, Reader in Biblical Theology at King’s College London, and professor elect of New Testament at Aberdeen, “is whether or not it is granted that the Christian Canon exists, that it has a centre, that this centre is the self-disclosure in Jesus of the triune God who is creator, reconciler and redeemer, and that an exegesis of a particular text cannot be regarded as *theologically* normative if it conflicts with what must be said at this centre” (248).

His book, accordingly, argues that Christian theology has to work across the conventional subject areas: biblical scholars must also practise systematic theology, and Christian New Testament scholars should also practise as Old Testament scholars, Old Testament scholars as New Testament scholars. Since Jesus is the centre of the Christian canon, all Christian doctrines have to be about him. Biblical Theology must be biblical and it must be theology.

Part One contains four studies in theological hermeneutics. In Chapter 1 Watson uses Gadamer and Ricoeur to argue that the fictive elements in the narration of the history of Jesus in the gospels are essential to the history, if the history is to found a community. The gospels “write the historic event that the life of Jesus was retrospectively seen to be” (53). In Chapter 2 Watson attacks Kermode’s reading of Mark as an indeterminate narrative with multiple possible meanings. He argues that the Gospel of Mark is gospel, not parable; its effect is “to expel the legion of discordant voices that destroy the integrity of the self, and to leave the hearer or reader clothed in his or her right mind” (73). In Chapter 3 he defends literal sense, authorial intention and objective interpretation. Psalm 42 (41) was intended to keep alive hope, and it continues in Christian worship to fulfil the same purpose. Psalm 137 (136):8–9 was intended to pray for vengeance, and cannot be used in Christian worship because countermanded by Jesus. In Chapter 4 Watson shows that Schleiermacher, Harnack and Bultmann were neo-Marcionites who wanted to remove the Old Testament from the Christian canon.

In Part Two Watson turns to reading the Old Testament in a Christological perspective. In Chapter 5 he shows that the three

scholars who are notable exponents of this approach (Eichrodt, von Rad and Childs), despite their weaknesses, are on the right road. In Chapter 6 Watson attacks Moltmann's view of creation as foundation in favour of a view of creation as beginning: the beginning of the story, with Jesus as the middle and end. He then turns on James Barr's case, in his Edinburgh Gifford Lectures, for saying that the Bible contains natural theology. Watson argues that neither Psalm 104 (103), the Areopagus speech in Acts 17, nor Paul's argument in Romans 1 about the universal knowledge of God is properly described as natural theology. Knowledge of God's power and deity can never be brought back to life without reference to Jesus. In Chapter 7 Watson argues that humanity's being in the likeness of God means, when we read the Bible as a whole, that everyone is like God because they are like Jesus (291). Some human beings can directly participate in Jesus' God-likeness in the Christian community (291–2). The Genesis texts are prophetic of Jesus. In Chapter 8 Watson shows how Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew defends his incarnational theology on the basis of Jewish scripture: Justin's "radical reinterpretation ... creates a fundamental rift *within* that [Jewish] heritage" (324).

Watson is reviving Barth's view of biblical theology, although he does not endorse everything Barth does with the Bible (247; 303 note 23). Like Barth, Watson sees Christian Biblical Theology as engaged in a power struggle against aggressive (106), high-handed (140), rigidly doctrinaire (209) subverters of the integrity of holy scripture as a whole (287). He attacks Bultmann for "interpreting the Christ-event as the radical divine challenge to human self-assertion, while practising precisely such self assertion in [his] arbitrary and high-handed treatment of the texts which provide our primary access to this event" (169). The difficulty is that, unless we can reason about what is right and good and true without necessarily referring to Jesus, we are hard put to it to distinguish one claim to power from another.

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## Short Notices

**THEORIES OF COGNITION IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES** by Robert Pasnau , *Cambridge University Press* , 1997, Pp. 330, £38.50.

Highly recommended on the wrapper by Scott McDonald, supervised in its original form by the late Norman Kretzmann, this fine book attests Cornell University's hospitable environment for medievalists who are also analytically trained philosophers. Primarily, the book

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