

particular Pelagians? Rist then sketches the outline of a contemporary Augustinian theology on this basis.

Why, one might wonder, ought one to want to do such a thing? Rist's uncompromisingly historical analysis should have made us wary of believing in an unchanging *philosophia Augustiniana perennis*. Augustine's work was of its own age, and even if, as Rist several times insists, he was uncannily aware of its potential future significance, later generations would produce their own 'Augustinisms', often with sorry results. Is it not better for us simply to read him as historians and leave it there? It would seem more honest to learn our theology directly from one another, and claim no spurious authority for it.

Rist prefaces his work with a famous quotation from Tacitus, 'sine ira et studio quorum causas procul habeo'. As a comment on his historical method, the quotation is apt. But perhaps Rist the philosopher has his tongue, in appropriately Tacitean style, at the edge of his cheek. Like Augustine, he is a Catholic philosopher. And his device of revivifying Augustine is a Catholic one. It is not clear to me that a non-Christian philosopher will learn a great deal from Augustine, except from his early works. But a Catholic philosopher can share enough of his methods and principles both to learn from his insights and to develop or modify them where necessary: to debate, in short, with *Augustinus redivivus*. By distinguishing his intellectual history precisely from his philosophical and theological exploration of Augustine's ideas, Rist shows himself clear and honest about what he is doing.

Historians of ideas have much to learn from this book. Those who are primarily theologians should no longer be able to get away with easy condemnations, or easy eulogies, of what passes for Augustine's theology. The new challenge is to debate with and learn from a more complex, less smoothly consistent thinker, whose meditation on God and man from the viewpoint of his own turbulent age still offers disturbingly relevant food for thought.

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TEXT, CHURCH AND WORLD: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE by Francis Watson. *T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994. viii + 360pp. £24.95.*

As the title suggests, this is a book advocating the primacy of systematic theology within biblical studies. The Preface clarifies this objective by explaining the use of the terms 'text', 'church', and 'world'. The book itself is in four parts.

Part One concerns the use of the text within the church. In this case, a theological reading of Scripture is consonant with the ecclesial shaping of the text in its final form. Chapter Two, 'Canon and Community' best illustrates this agenda, where Watson develops (and overall defends) Childs' and Brett's canonical approach, and their emphasis on the final form, comparing these with the critiques of Barton, Barr and Sanders.

Parts Two and Three concern more the interface between 'text' and 'world'. Part Two is a dialogue with postmodernism, especially as it is expressed in literary theory by scholars such as Derrida, Eagleton, Barthes, Habermas, Foucault, McFadyen and Moore. Watson seeks to mediate between the (Christian) traditionalist and (secular) postmodernist persuasions, defending more the universalist (Christian) claims for meaning which are presumed in the biblical texts, against the particularist (postmodern) view of reality expressed in modern literary theories. His watchword is the 'intratextual realism' of Scripture—an understanding of a particular reality in the text which is nevertheless universal because it transcends the text. Chapter Seven, 'Narratives of Postmodernity' highlights well the argument in Part Two.

Part Three (probably the most important and persuasive heart of the book) is a dialogue with feminist critique of Scripture, and here Watson discusses scholars such as Bach, Bal, Fiorenza, Ruether, Moltmann-Wendel, Daly, Hampson, Loades and Trible. His thesis is that the biblical texts can still serve the equality of women in the church; their 'androcentricism' is transcended by a theological reality which is found within but also beyond the texts themselves. The task of the interpreter is to distinguish between the 'liberating gospel' and the 'oppressive law' when reading the Bible—itsself another aspect of reading with an eye to 'intratextual realism'.

Part Four underpins the work with an explanation of the theological hermeneutic which has been applied in the earlier chapters. First, the Christological focus: Christ is not only mediated within the biblical texts, but also points us to a reality beyond the texts. Secondly, the framework of this (divine) reality is shaped between the creation and the eschaton, a shaping which offers a more universal scope than that enclosed within the texts alone. Thirdly, this reality is grounded not only in the text but also in the life of the (Christian) community, by the expression of the love of God within its midst. And fourthly, Watson defends the resurrection as another sign of this reality, again expressed within the biblical text and yet also experienced outside it.

This is not an easy book to assimilate and assess. On the one hand, the author is at pains to state that the text must be in dialogue with the world—the world of academia, where pluralism, secularism and subjectivism are the order of the day. And indeed, the complexities of style and argument make this a book for the well-read, discerning academic. Yet the theological assumptions, and at times the polemic (for example, the distinction made between the 'believer' and the 'unbeliever') result in it undermining the very audience it might appear first to address, for Watson's thesis upholds the primary value of the church over and against the university. Its theological hermeneutic is unashamedly a defence of a faith-reading of the text, and this inevitably creates a tension between the text-in-the-church and the text-in-the world.

Certainly there are points which commend Watson's hermeneutic. His repeated emphasis on the interplay between 'text' and 'reality' is

important for both sides of the divide. To argue for a text which is not simply a self-enclosed entity protects Scripture from a fanatical biblicism on the one hand, and from the obsessive internalising of literary theory on the other:

'If, as Derrida puts it, there is nothing outside the text . . . then it will become axiomatic that 'God', the transcendent signifier who was supposed to provide thought with its transcendent ground, is to be reinscribed as immanent within textuality Theology must reject a hermeneutic that condemns the biblical text to narcissistic self-referentiality.' (p. 85; p. 137)

The text is a means of traversing from an imagined world to a transcendent reality beyond:

' . . . biblical interpretation must therefore abandon the myth of the self-enclosed text and learn to correlate the text with the reality to which it bears witness . . . ' (p. 293)

Watson's hermeneutic is by no means high-minded idealism. He takes appropriate texts and re-reads them in the light of his own methodology, engaging throughout with other theories of interpretation. He offers an engaging reading of the Joseph stories in Genesis 37–50, the narratives of the slavery in Egypt in Exodus 1–2, the creation accounts, the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the account of glossalalia in 1 Corinthians 14—all of which are used to demonstrate that there exists another 'reality', beyond the world of the text.

But, as hinted at earlier, such a clear hermeneutic also creates inherent problems. Watson polarises what many scholars (believers included) would wish to see existing in creative tension. Two particular examples deserve mention.

The first polarisation is that of the 'text-in-the-church' and the 'text-in-the-world'. In all fairness, Watson states clearly at the outset that 'biblical interpretation is a university-based as well as church-based activity', albeit one whose 'dual location creates the possibility both of co-operation and of conflict' (p. 7). But the basic premise is that the true enterprise for theology is the church (we might question here why the Christian tradition is more normative than Jewish tradition, even when using the Old Testament):

'Text, church and world are thus related to one another as three concentric circles. The text, the innermost circle, is located within the church, and the church is located in the world, the outermost circle. . . . In correlating text, church and world, the term 'world' must instead be understood theologically.' (p. 11; p. 9)

Again in fairness to Watson, he notes that 'truth can still be apprehended through social discourse with the world; and this in turn

means that the church, like the text, is prevented from having that 'narcissistic self-referentiality.' The church needs academia. But this by no means an open two-way dialogue between church and world, with the text playing the mediating role. Watson has a fundamental suspicion of the ability of the university world to determine any independent meaning in a biblical text:

'If theology is to be Christian, however, the ecclesial community must be seen as the primary point of reference.'
(p. 6).

Behind all this is a negative view of the influence of the Enlightenment (p. 8), alongside a mistrust of natural theology spawned in the Enlightenment (p. 152), and a wariness about any evolutionary scheme in the making of Christian doctrine (p. 257). However, with a broader framework of reference for theology (and, in his defence of universal reality, Watson is overall open to, accepting such a broader scheme of things) it could be possible to propound a biblical hermeneutic whereby the university and the church were engaged with an equal yet interdependent enterprise. At this point in time, when relations between the theological enterprise of the church and the university are under strain, one wonders whether a more eirenic hermeneutic which presses more for cooperation and less for conflict between the two communities is a more practicable way forward.

The second polarisation is between the diachronic and synchronic approaches to the text, or between historical and literary criticism. Yet again, in fairness to Watson, he recognises the importance (in principle) of both approaches:

'There is no reason in principle why diachronic and synchronic perspectives should not complement rather than contradict each other. . . ' (p. 46)

He admits, too, that over-emphasis on the 'final form' can lead us to 'overlook the genuinely and permanently significant work that is still being undertaken within the historical-critical paradigm' (p. 59). Historical criticism can still enable us to see the text as an entity in a public, socio-political domain, and so prevent the text being only an aesthetic object in an enclosed and self-contained world (p. 60).

However, for similar reasons as to his reticence about the role of academia in being able to shape theologically the biblical text, Watson is on the whole mistrustful of historical criticism: it 'hypothesises' (p. 77) and is a 'very minor component in the more comprehensive understanding that is desirable' (p. 228). Hence the repeated emphasis on the final form of the text: this removes the text from its diachronic framework (p. 15), and, particularly in the case of feminist critique of the biblical text, gives us a new interpretative paradigm rather than being dependent upon the reconstruction of a historical context into which the full status of women

leaves a lot to be desired (p. 158). Furthermore, historical criticism has little to offer the feminist critic (and, for that matter, the church), for it lacks a real commitment and personal engagement with the text:

'Historical critics can remain indifferent to the implications of their findings for church and synagogue, but feminist interpreters cannot afford the luxury of this disengagement.'
(p. 188)

One could argue that both of the two previous objections could apply equally to literary theory as well. And overall, it has to be said that one way of preventing the lapse into subjectivity with a self-enclosed text is to use the diachronic approach as well as the synchronic one. For example, in the debate about the historical Jesus (pp. 217ff.) it is clear that a diachronic approach, in spite of all its scepticism, nevertheless opens up an engagement with the person of Jesus in terms of more than a merely literary figure. Furthermore, in the light of the present debate in academic circles about the relationship between the historical and literary approaches, a hermeneutic which polarises the two will tear apart any theological enterprise which (to use Watson's own thesis) seeks to establish a reality outside the world of the text. Both approaches need rather to co-exist—albeit in creative tension

Watson makes it clear that 'texts are abused when they are subjected to a type of question they were never intended to answer.' (p. 226). But, given that neither the historical method nor literary theory were questions within the minds of the first writers, reader, or of those who established the final form of the text, even on Watson's own terms, we have to recognise the contingent nature of the whole hermeneutical task. We are in fact subjecting the biblical text to questions which it was never intended to answer: and we have to do so, if we are to enable the text to communicate to us in any new ways at all. Yet our questions will depend not only on our religious beliefs, but also on our particular culture, race and gender, as well as on our literary and our historical sympathies: to use Watson's schema, the affairs of the world as much as the affairs of the church are both at work in this respect. Consequently, we cannot afford to be over-dogmatic in asserting that only one approach will work, and alongside that, only one set of questions and hence one series of answers. For believers such as Watson, a church-based theology may well provide the best key. But for others, a more university-based theology (for a theology it still is) may be equally important. Surely what matters most is that mutual respect and freedom should affirm the theological enterprise of the other.

Watson undoubtedly succeeds in provoking us to reflect on our own theological premise and its application to our exegesis of the text. Although that might not have been his primary aim, it is nevertheless one which will serve the whole hermeneutical debate—from both sides of the divide—rather well.

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