

# Biblical Studies Bulletin

Edited by Michael B Thompson—Published Quarterly—Read Religiously—Disposed of Reluctantly—Free to Grove Biblical Subscribers

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## Special Report —————

### British New Testament Society Conference —————

*(The BNTC conference occurred too late to make the deadline for our last issue)*

The 25th annual conference of the British New Testament Society was hosted by the Department of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield. It began on August 31st at 5.45 pm with a reception at Ranmoor Hall for those who somehow managed to negotiate horrific rush hour traffic in central Sheffield further delayed by a cycling event. Thankfully the conference was worth our car's experience of grid lock. In the last stage of driving, I had the opportunity of observing first-hand the Christian patience of Professors Stanton, Hooker and Marshall; somehow I was given grace to keep my mouth shut as we endured a spell of bumper to bumper Gehenna.

Graham gave the first plenary paper, surveying messianism and christology in the synoptic gospels, drawing particular attention to the variety of themes present and some key questions that remain. It was particularly fitting for Professor Stanton to speak, as he was one of the founding members of the society and will be retiring at the end of this academic year.

In the Paul seminar section that I attended, we heard short summaries of papers already distributed via email, and had some interesting discussion. The first session featured two comparisons of Paul with Philo: John Barclay on their notions of the relationship between grace and human activity, and George van Kooten on their conceptions of humanity as tripartite (body, soul, spirit; I was less convinced on this one). John's paper was particular helpful in his analysis of Paul's view as not a zero-sum game (as if more grace necessarily meant less human effort, or *vice versa*), but rather as grace working in and energizing further human action.

Our second section after coffee featured two more papers: John Riches on the reception history of Gal 6.15 (specifically notions of a 'new creation/creature') and Mark Elliott surveying the diversity of interpretations of Rom 7.14-8.4 as seen in

eleven commentaries written between 1532-1542. Riches was typically provocative in his comparison of Roman Catholicism with Protestantism and in his view of recent Romans commentaries (printing a quotation here would be unwise!), but I was dragging by the time the discussion of the papers finished.

The afternoon featured short papers by Jonathan Campbell on early Jewish scripture, Crispin Fletcher-Louis on Jewish monotheism and NT Christology, Sang-il Lee on bilingualism of the Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church, and John Vincent on interpreting Mark. Some of us gave these a miss and walked, slept, read or typed conference summary notes for dubious publications.

The Friday evening plenary paper is typically a light-hearted affair, sometimes with the benefits of an a/v presentation. Aably assisted by Powerpoint, Peter Williams spoke on 'Farewell to the Prologue of John'. Not advocating a reduced canon, his point was that the earliest Greek manuscripts, versions and references in the church fathers do not reflect the modern notion of 1-18 as a prologue, but favour a major division after 1.5 and also *after* 1.14. This was a good reminder of how we are all influenced by the layout of the text in modern editions of the bible.

On the final day, we began with another seminar session (papers by Preston Sprinkle on Paul's use of Lev 18.5 in Rom 9.30-10.8 and Yon Kwon on Spirit as *arrabon* in 2Cor 1.22 and 5.5. The final plenary paper by Maurice Casey offered the bold title (but unsurprising for Maurice, who retired from Nottingham University just before the conference), 'The Solution of the Son of Man Problem'.

Summaries of many of the seminar papers can be found on the Society's web page ([www.ntgateway.com/bnts](http://www.ntgateway.com/bnts)). The main papers will no doubt be published in a year or so in books and journals that mortals such as I cannot afford. All in all it was a good conference attended by about 160 lecturers and research students; next year we'll meet in Exeter.

## Book Reviews

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Anthony B Robinson and Robert W Wall, *Called to be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006, xii + 286 pp; £11.99; ISBN-10: 0-8028-6065-6. ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-6065-1). This book is a highly readable attempt to connect serious academic study of the Bible with the practical business of heeding the message of scripture in the life of the church. Wall is a university New Testament teacher, and has already written the Acts commentary in the New Interpreter's Bible. Robinson is a long-serving pastor in the United Church of Christ. Wall is towards the conservative end of the theological spectrum, and Robinson more liberal. Together they work through a number of key chapters and scenes in Acts, teasing out ways that we might respond to the text, as we try to be church and to serve the mission of Christ.

A dozen texts are treated. Wall writes about ten pages of explanation on each, and Robinson takes another ten to relate the text to some issues of today. So Acts 10 is about 'the conversion of the believer' (158), and the complexities and opportunities of church life in a multicultural world. Acts 15 is about managing church conflict

at times of change. Paul's Athens encounter in Acts 17 speaks to today's growing interest in spirituality, about 'a God who is less concerned to make our lives a little better than to make us new' (227).

The authors' context is American, their style clear, their thinking lively, and their method attentive to both text and world. The principal target readership seems to be clergy. There is a subject index, and no footnotes.

Interpreting Acts is vital, in pastoral leadership and in church life. Most people who read this book will do it better as a result.

*John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge*

Stanley E Porter (ed), *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, (Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; 304 pp; £16.99; ISBN: 0-802-82846-9). This book is full of questions and lines of thought to help us understand how the NT authors draw on the OT. The nature of the OT is an important area of enquiry; in what forms and languages were its books available to the NT writers, and what sense of canon did they have? Jesus' own use of scripture is a key issue, for it is his sayings that the gospel writers record. And the Hellenistic context matters too, both attitudes to ancient authority in the discourse and rhetoric of the wider Greco-Roman world, and the Roman imperium, which influenced the ways that some NT authors wrote about Jesus.

So the papers gathered here, which were read at a colloquium in Ontario in 2003, raise a variety of issues and concerns. All the NT authors are discussed, and indeed most of its books. One insight among many is that Luke's account of Christian mission is formed and framed by scripture citations: in Luke 4 and 24, and in Acts 2 and 28, the OT outlines the gospel and the course it takes.

The use of the OT in the NT is too broad a subject for this to be a comprehensive textbook. But it certainly contains enough both to inform the reader for whom this is a new quest, and to interest the more seasoned scholar. One such veteran is Andreas Köstenberger, whose weighty and thoughtful response to the work of the other nine authors is the last and longest chapter. The vigour of his reflections makes clear that this is a lively and current field.

*John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge*

Here are three recent and unusually lively books of possible interest to *BSB* readers, from the untamed fields of current hermeneutical thinking:

Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005; £10.99; ISBN: 0-664-22917-4). Ekblad works with Tierra Nueva ministries in the Eastern US, and writes from experience of leading Bible studies in jail and in various other contexts with those who have failed the 'system'. The result is a startling and engaging account of how to help people see those places where God speaks for them, over against the expectation of judgment and exclusion. The style is anecdotal, slightly repetitive, but full of wonderful examples of how the text comes alive. The scholarship is worn lightly, seeking to illustrate his point that 'The best intercultural exegesis will be informed by the latest biblical studies research, illuminated by detailed knowledge of the current reading context and a pastoral sensitivity to individual readers' (p 79). Sections on Gen 4 and Ps 8 were two particular highlights.

Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers must take Religion Seriously* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005; £10.99; ISBN: 0-521-61824-X). This one is making waves in the academy, though it may be of less interest to ministers, apart from its entertaining style, and its intriguing illustration of the principle that everyone thinks they're in the minority. In this case it is atheists and secular readers standing against the tide of lazy confessional commitment, though part of the agenda is that nonbelievers don't even know what they're fighting any more (and that perhaps biblical scholarship takes some blame for this). Too much time is spent on questions of OT authorship, but a chapter on 'Why is there so much biblical interpretation?' and case studies in Jewish intermarriage and same-sex eroticism are well-documented and perceptive reads.

Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (eds.), *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005; \$39.95; ISBN: 1-58983-171-1). Here are 273 short case studies in how to teach the Bible, packed with illustrations from film, music, literature, and well-indexed too. Most of the 93 contributors use a robust critical approach. Each entry is short and focused, allowing quick evaluation of how one might (or might not) use it. A big happy grab-bag: all Bible teachers should try it at least for a while.

*Richard Briggs, Cranmer Hall, Durham*

*Reading the Bible: Approaching and Understanding Scripture* (Birmingham: Student Christian Movement, 2006; £10; 56 pp). This resource attractively presents a lot of good material, containing brief articles on a variety of topics (2-3 A4 pages each), written by distinguished experts from a moderate critical perspective. These provide helpful summaries of issues such as the composition of the OT (John Rogerson), translation (John Barton), ideology (Robert Beckford), and a Jewish perspective (Dan Cohn-Sherbok). These expect a fair reading competence, and so would not suit every parish group.

Each article or group of articles is followed by a study, most of which are designed for groups. These are based on some good ideas – eg using four passages in Ephesians to show how most readers interpret some bits of the Bible quite directly, other bits less so (injunctions relating to slavery), with disagreement on yet others (injunctions to wives and husbands). It is implied that the reader of the book will be the leader of the study, and certainly some of the studies would need careful facilitation, perhaps drawing on more background information than is included in the book.

The accompanying CD contains three short assemblages of vox pops, a few extra written resources, some web links, and the studies from the book for printing out. The book itself has in its margins a variety of quotations about the Bible and some Bible trivia. There are also a series of cartoons entitled 'Bad News Bible?' where Good News Bible-style illustrations accompany some of the Bible's more difficult texts, such as 'I do not allow a woman to speak'. BSB readers I suspect will not agree with everything! For example, the article on 'picking and choosing' doesn't really face the key question of whether there is a principled way of deciding which texts to take at face value and which not – rather than asking how we can interpret responsibly, the rhetorical effect at least is to suggest that all we can do is pick and choose. But careful picking and choosing (!) from this book could yield helpful material for tackling some tricky issues in a parish setting.

*Keith Beech-Grüneberg, Director of Studies for the Diocese of Oxford*

# Comments on Commentaries –

*An assessment of commentaries on books of the Bible to keep you up to date with what will help in preaching and teaching in the local church. This issue's survey is by Dr Paul Joyce, University Lecturer at Oxford and author of several books on Ezekiel.*

## Ezekiel

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The austere and yet magnificent book of Ezekiel is well served by commentaries of various kinds. Among detailed technical commentaries, two older works stand out: the ICC volume of **G A Cooke** (T & T Clark, 1936) and the massive two volumes of the doyen of modern Ezekiel studies, the late Swiss **Walther Zimmerli** (Hermeneia; Fortress, 1979, 1983). Though technical, Zimmerli also has some profound theological reflection to impart, some of it overtly Christian. Readers wanting a more recent thorough treatment of the philological and other historical-critical questions, together with Christian theological insight, are well served by the commentaries of **Leslie Allen** (Word, 2 vols, 1994, 1990) and especially the admirable **Daniel Block** (NICOT; Eerdmans, 2 vols, 1997, 1998). If Zimmerli may be taken to represent one pillar of modern Ezekiel studies, that which attempts to reconstruct a complex redactional history for the book, the other pillar may be represented by the distinctively different Jewish scholar **Moshe Greenberg**. Two volumes of his Anchor Bible commentary are available, taking us to the end of chapter 37 and featuring a holistic approach (Doubleday, 1983, 1997). Alas, ill health has prevented Greenberg's completion of the third and final volume, upon which the distinguished **Jacob Milgrom** is now working.

**Calvin's** commentary on chapters 1–12, lectures delivered in 1563–64 (Rutherford House Translation; Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1994) is a treasure trove; sadly, it now looks unlikely that the projected second volume of this translation, on the also extant chapters 13–20, will appear. Brief but often rich, including some theological nuggets, are the contributions of two wise old birds, **Joseph Blenkinsopp** (Interpretation; John Knox, 1990) and **Ronald Clements** (Westminster Bible Companion; Westminster/John Knox, 1996 – strictly not described as a commentary, but well worth mentioning in this context). The latest commentary is a delightful and well-informed volume from **Margaret Odell** in the lavishly-presented Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series (Smyth and Helwys, 2006). Finally, three fine commentaries that have appeared in recent years as part of big Bible Commentaries: **Kathe Darr**, in the *New Interpreter's Bible* (vol 6; Abingdon, 2001); **Julie Galambush**, in the *Oxford Bible Commentary* (OUP, 2001); and the prolific **John Goldingay**, in the *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2003).

For preachers seeking encouragement and help in relating Ezekiel to the present day, **Iain Duguid's** thorough volume in the NIV Application Commentary series (Zondervan, 1999) is recommended, together with **Chris Wright's** warm contribution to the Bible Speaks Today series (IVP, 2001).

*Dr Paul Joyce, St Peter's College, Oxford*

# Computer Corner

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- A terrific online resource for people who want to keep their NT Greek alive is Zack Hubert's website ([www.zhubert.com](http://www.zhubert.com)). There to the left alongside his blog are links allowing you to access the Greek text; pass your mouse pointer over each word and it is automatically parsed on screen. This is a great free tool for students, and vocabulary lists and flashcards are also provided. Highly recommended, and many thanks to Mark Goodacre's fine blogsite ([www.ntgateway.com/weblog](http://www.ntgateway.com/weblog)) for the tip.
- A fine resource for online bibliographic searches is WorldCat ([www.worldcat.org](http://www.worldcat.org)), which provides information about books, articles, music and videos.
- David Instone-Brewer has improved the online Tyndale House (Cambridge) catalogue, updating it with links enabling you to read online - in some cases - specific pages from the books via Amazon ([www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/TynCat3//Browse](http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/TynCat3//Browse)).
- Matthew Page writes to tell us of his Bible Films Blog (<http://biblefilms.blogspot.com>), which he says is the largest website looking at the subject of film interpretations of stories in the Bible.
- For PC users, Logos bible study software has been upgraded to version 3, and the company is hard at work digitizing every theological book it can lay its hands on. The text of several heavy duty reference sets including the entire Hermeneia commentary series, G C Berkouwer's *Studies in Dogmatics*, and W Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* are available on CD ([www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com)); Barth is on the way. Unfortunately this is all for people with deep pockets; you know you're in trouble when (as with Bose adverts) the price is not stated up front.

Meanwhile, Bibleworks 7 ([www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com)) remains a good alternative for those who choose to remain outside the Mac / Accordance kingdom.

# Grove Biblical Series

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This month's booklet (B42) is *One God Among Many?* by Richard Briggs, Director of Biblical Studies and Hermeneutics at Cranmer Hall, Durham. Richard explores the question of which god (or God) the Bible is talking about, and how that relates to which god (or God) we are talking about today.

Individual titles in the Biblical Series are available direct from Grove Books at **£2.95 each**. Annual subscription (4 books) costs **£8.50, a saving of 28%**. Call, fax, email [sales@grovebooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@grovebooks.co.uk) or visit [www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk) to order.

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