

# Biblical Studies Bulletin

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

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## A Word from the Editor —————

With the news that my boss has been called to become the next bishop of Coventry, I've decided that the time has come to give up the editorship of *BSB* for good. My sterling colleagues in the Grove Biblical Group may well decide to maintain this publication; in the meantime, I'm grateful for the encouragement I've received over the last twelve years from readers.

There are three books that have stayed on my desk for far too long awaiting mention; the reason for the delay is that they moved out of my review pile into my 'active' pile because they were so good. Mark Allan Powell's *Giving to God. The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; ISBN 0-8028-2926-0) is an excellent, nuanced and lively discussion of biblical teaching about stewardship. This paperback would be an excellent resource for study groups as well as for individuals seeking renewal and preachers looking for good material. Anthony C Thiselton's *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; ISBN 0-8028-2682-2) condenses Thiselton's massive NIGTC volume and makes his conclusions very accessible, although occasionally it will make you want the larger book. Finally, Marianne Meye Thompson's *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005; ISBN 0-8028-2715-2) in the Two Horizons NT series provides a very thoughtful and theologically-focussed commentary.

*Michael Thompson, Vice-Principal, Ridley Hall, Cambridge*

## Confessions of a Blogger —————

Mike asked me to write about five blogs that I like to visit and why. But once I began to think about doing this I realised that in fact I don't visit blogs in terms of a top five, but I browse a larger range of blogs grazing for information. Professionally speaking the main things I like about blogs are reports from conferences, reviews

of articles and books, general scholarly news, as well as discussions of and responses to topical issues. I am partly responsible for Evangelical Textual Criticism ([evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com](http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com)) which is a good place to discuss manuscripts, variants and textual news. Beyond that there are a range of New Testament scholars with fairly established blogs which I visit fairly regularly, some of them blog mostly about the NT, with conference news, book reviews, new journals etc. (eg Mark Goodacre [[ntgateway.com/weblog](http://ntgateway.com/weblog)], Euaggelion [[euangelizomai.blogspot.com](http://euangelizomai.blogspot.com)]), but many blog about a surprising range of things (Ben Witherington [[www.benwitherington.blogspot.com](http://www.benwitherington.blogspot.com)], Scot McNight [[jesuscreed.org](http://jesuscreed.org)], AKMA [[akma.disseminary.org](http://akma.disseminary.org)], David Black [[daveblackonline.com/blog.htm](http://daveblackonline.com/blog.htm)], James Crossley [[earliestchristianhistory.blogspot.com](http://earliestchristianhistory.blogspot.com)], Chris Tilling [[christilling.de/blog/ctblog.html](http://christilling.de/blog/ctblog.html)]). I like Better Bibles Blog [[englishbibles.blogspot.com](http://englishbibles.blogspot.com)] for discussion about translation issues (and its offshoot Complegalitarian [[complegalitarian.blogspot.com](http://complegalitarian.blogspot.com)], which I haven't quite got into yet). I also track blogs in some adjacent areas in which I have teaching or research interests just to keep in touch (Epigraphy [[currentepigraphy.org](http://currentepigraphy.org)], Papyrology [[papyrology.blogspot.com](http://papyrology.blogspot.com)], Egyptology [[egyptology.blogspot.com](http://egyptology.blogspot.com)], Phil Harland [[philipharland.com/Blog](http://philipharland.com/Blog)]), as well as non-canonical texts (James Tabor [[jesusdynasty.com/blog](http://jesusdynasty.com/blog)], April DeConick [[forbiddengospels.blogspot.com](http://forbiddengospels.blogspot.com)], Tony Chartrand-Burke [[tonychartrand-burke.com/apocryphicity](http://tonychartrand-burke.com/apocryphicity)]). The monthly Biblical Studies Carnival [[biblical-studies.ca/carnival](http://biblical-studies.ca/carnival)] usually manages to inform about action more broadly among the biblioblog community. I also use blogs to keep in touch with church news (Thinking Anglicans [[thinkinganglicans.org.uk](http://thinkinganglicans.org.uk)], Fulcrum [[fulcrum-anglican.org.uk](http://fulcrum-anglican.org.uk)], TitusOneNine [[kendallharmon.net/t19](http://kendallharmon.net/t19)], Justin Taylor [[theologica.blogspot.com](http://theologica.blogspot.com)], Fred Clark [[slacktivist.typepad.com](http://slacktivist.typepad.com)]). I confess as well that for a few days I enjoyed the secret diary of D A Carson [[fakecarson.blogspot.com](http://fakecarson.blogspot.com)].

*Peter Head, New Testament Research Fellow, Tyndale House, Cambridge*

## Book Reviews

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Larry W Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). ISBN 978-0-8028-2895-8.

In this interesting book Larry Hurtado attempts to show how early Christian manuscripts can contribute to historical questions about early Christianity. Obviously we know that the manuscripts are important for textual criticism and questions about the text of the New Testament and other early Christian texts, but what do the manuscripts themselves tell us about the formation of Christian identity, canon formation, early devotion to Jesus as Lord, and other such topics? Well, 'much in every way' according to Hurtado. Firstly he works with the question of which texts are extant in what sort of numbers in the second and third centuries, reflecting their popularity and/or marginality. Hurtado notes a general preference for 'canonical texts', and has a range of interesting discussions about various groups of texts. He thinks, for example, that the Gospel of Thomas texts, of which two are on rolls and one on a codex, were perhaps not regarded as Scripture. Did you know that the only texts from this period now extant in double figures are Psalms, Matthew, John and the Shepherd of Hermas?

There is plenty of material here for more reflection and research on the form of material preserved. Secondly he discusses the Christian preference for the codex (over against the roll) – perhaps due to the impact of an early edition of Paul in codex form. Thirdly he discusses the *nomina sacra*, a technique for abbreviating, or more accurately contracting, the Greek words for God, Lord, Jesus, Christ (and a number of others) in early manuscripts. This developed from, and reflects, according to Hurtado, early Christian devotion to Jesus as Lord. Fourthly he discusses the cross (stauros and the verb) in a special sort of contraction for words associated with the cross (stauros and the verb) in which the rho is drawn over the tau, such that the abbreviation itself looks like a depiction of a crucified man. He finally discusses a lot of different scribal features.

I found it an interesting read, but then it is a field I was already interested in. There are things for the experts to quarrel with, there are things to stimulate further thought and research. Mostly Hurtado is more interested in reaching back behind the actual manuscripts as artefacts, to the historical origins of a particular feature. But I recommend this book and welcome it warmly.

*Peter Head, Tyndale House, Cambridge.*

Dale C. Allison Jr, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). ISBN 0-8010-2791-8, \$34.99, 282 hb.

Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (trans R. Selle; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). ISBN 0-8028-3964-9, \$30.00, 397 pp pb.

Here we have essay collections from two of the foremost contemporary scholars and commentators on Matthew, representing a North America and a European perspective. Dale Allison, who teaches in Pittsburgh (somewhere in America); is well known as the primary author (collaborating with W D Davies) of the three volume ICC commentary on Matthew (the preface to the third volume clarifies the authorship situation). Ulrich Luz, who taught in Bern, Switzerland (somewhere in Europe); is well known as the author of the three volume Hermeneia commentary on Matthew (translated from the four volume German Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament). Both have also written other well regarded books on Matthew. Both contained essays written in the process of commentary writing, outlining more fully some aspects of Matthew's thought. Both write these essays with one eye firmly fixed on issues of Wirkungsgeschichte, the history of the influence of Matthew down the centuries. Now Matthew is a good text to work with in this area since it was so popular and so much discussed that there are plenty of resources.

Allison's book contains thirteen essays on various aspects of the interpretation of Matthew. The first six essays deal with the history of the interpretation of particular texts in Matthew; illustrating 'how profoundly the exegetical present is indebted to the exegetical past'. Five of these deal with details (and I do indeed mean details) from Matthew in light of their history of interpretation: 'The Magi's Angel (Matt 2.2,9f)', 'Seeing God (Matt 5.8)', 'Murder and Anger, Cain and Abel' (Matt 5.21-25), 'Darkness at Noon (Matt 27.45)', 'Touching Jesus' Feet (Matt 28.9). The sixth essay, 'Reading Matthew through the Church Fathers' discusses more generally how the study of patristic interpretations of Matthew can help the contemporary interpreter of Matthew (dealing with intertextuality, culture, theology, and rhetoric).

The other essays in this collection deal with a range of, somewhat more traditional topics: 'Structure, Biographical Impulse, and the Imitatio Christi'; 'Matthew's First Two Words (Matt 1.1)', 'Divorce, Celibacy, and Joseph (Matt 1.18-25)', 'The Configuration of the Sermon on the Mount and Its Meaning', 'Foreshadowing the Passion', 'Deconstructing Matthew' and 'Slaughtered Infants'. Allison is a stimulating writer and an investigative researcher, I found his essays informative and stimulating (not because I always agreed with them).

Luz's book contains eighteen essays, mostly translated into English for the first time and range over the whole range of Matthean studies including more traditional ones (e.g. 'Matthew and Q', 'Matthean Christology', 'The Disciples in Matthew') and concluding with six essays which contain more hermeneutical reflections, especially on Wirkungsgeschichte. Of these I especially liked his essay on 'The Significance of the Church Fathers for Biblical Interpretation in Western Protestant Perspective' – they are very important, especially in view of their Christo-centric hermeneutic, and unjustifiably neglected; and his 'Canonical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of "Effective History"', but the others are interesting too! Luz's wisdom and honesty, his interactions between historical-critical, canonical and reception historical concerns are always illuminating. A giant.

*Peter Head, Tyndale House, Cambridge*

Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the "Exile"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). ISBN 0-664-23130-6.

'The templeless age' is Jill Middlemas' coinage for the period more commonly thought of as the 'exile'. For during the sixth century BC, everyone from Israel (i.e. technically the kingdom of Judah) had to live without the Temple: only some went into exile in Babylon, while others fled to places such as Egypt and many remained in the land. And (Middlemas argues) texts from the period between 539 and 515, when people could come back from Babylon but the temple was not yet restored, are more similar to those from the period of the exile than to those from later periods (such as Ezra and Nehemiah).

After an introductory chapter on the historical issues, the book considers those Old Testament texts which come from the templeless age, in Middlemas' fairly standard critical view. Chapter 2 'The Aftermath of Disaster: I Lamentation' examines Lamentations and those Psalms in which the people bewail what had happened to them. Chapter 3 'The Aftermath of Disaster: II Memory' looks at how the deuteronomic history explains what had happened. Chapter 4 'Between Judgment and Hope' focuses on the mixed messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In chapter 5 'The Turn to Hope: I Prophetic Visions of Divine Reversal' the primarily hopeful messages of deuterо-Isaiah and Ezekiel 40-48 are examined. Finally 'The Turn to Hope: II Commitment to Covenant' considers Haggai, Zechariah 1-8 and Leviticus 17-26 (the 'Holiness Code').

The primary focus of the book is historical, examining how each of the texts considered is a response to the situation of the sixth century. At times it is clear the book is designed as a text book for a university course (beyond first year level), when it surveys views on a topic without coming to any clear conclusions. However there is a very definite concern for what contemporary

Christians might learn from the texts, summed up in the final chapter under the themes of communication, creativity, memory, inheritance and inclusion.

*Keith Beech-Grüneberg, Director of Studies, 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 Revd Dr Pieter J Lalleman, tutor in New Testament at Spurgeon's College.*

All relevant commentaries deal with the three Johannine Epistles in one volume. Consequently, the two small epistles are usually tucked away at the end, which reflects their position as little postcards at the end of the New Testament. In his contribution to the New International Commentary series (1978), **I Howard Marshall** comments on them before 1 John and for this reason deserves praise. (I follow the same order in my 2005 commentary in Dutch.) In other respects too Marshall's is still one of the best commentaries in the market after 30 years. His introduction is long enough to be helpful and he displays a great love for the biblical text. On the opposite end of the spectrum is **J Leslie Houlden** (Black's, 2nd ed 1994) who cannot hide his contempt for the author(s) and also makes numerous dubious comments.

Nearly all commentaries presuppose the existence of a Johannine community and we still eagerly await the impact of Richard Bauckham's *The Gospels for all Christians* on the study of the Johannine Epistles. For this reason the readers might hold on to their money for a while. After all, prestigious series such as Baker's Exegetical Commentary, the International Critical Commentary and the New International Greek Testament Commentary have no volume on 1-3 John just yet. In the meantime, pastors who read Greek will enjoy **Martin M Culy**, *1, 2, 3 John: a Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004) which is not a full commentary but very useful.

Even **Ben Witherington III's** 2006 contribution (Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume I, IVP) still thinks in terms of community. I saw it too late to use it much but it offers a good, full-length exposition of the epistles and pays specific attention to application. On the downside, it refers to the author of 2 and 3 John as "the old man" and it is bound in one volume with the Pastoral Epistles! Badly affected by the need to forget the myths about the Johannine community is surely **R E Brown's** massive tome (Anchor Bible, 1982) which now looks very dated and always was a bit much for the pastor anyway!

For scholarly purposes some older commentaries are still worth consulting, such as **B F Westcott** (1892; reprinted with an introduction by **F F Bruce**, 1966) and **C H Dodd** (1946); the former is much more positive about the epistles than the latter. A good and more recent scholarly work is **Rudolf Schnackenburg** (1992) - just ignore the fact that he sees John's adversaries as Gnostics, a view which is now out of date. **John Painter** (Sacra Pagina, 2002) is huge and technical but dry. I often find myself disagreeing with **Stephen Smalley** (Word, 1984) who distinguishes several opponents of the author of 1 John and who often presents what I consider to be unlikely combinations of interpretations. **Georg Strecker** (Hermeneia, 1996) can be used with

profit by the discerning minister but is not a first choice because of his eccentricity. My favourite among the scholarly works is the slim volume by **Alfred Plummer** (*The Cambridge Bible*, 1916; repr. Grand Rapids, 1980) which is also edifying.

At the popular level, **David Rensberger** (*Westminster Bible Companion*, 2001) finds himself disagreeing with the text he comments upon while **David Jackman** (*The Bible Speaks Today*, 1988) imposes a doctrinal grid on the text. The pastor will profit more from **Marianne M Thompson** (*IVP NT Commentary*, 1992) than from **Thomas F Johnson** (*New International Biblical Commentary*, 1993) or **Gary M Burge** (*NIV Application Commentary*, 1996), although Johnson has some good insights into the enigmatic structure of 1 John. **William Loader** (*Epworth*, 1992) has good insights but is too thin to satisfy. **John Stott** (*Tyndale*, 1960, 2nd ed. 1988) is still the best available popular level work. At 234 pages Stott's volume gives more space to exposition than most others, and although he is not original, he usefully combines excellent knowledge of what others wrote with good applications. As with Schnackenburg, ignore his references to Gnostics.

Best buy at this moment, ahead of Marshall and Stott, would be **Colin Kruse** (*Pillar New Testament Commentaries*, 2000). This medium-sized commentary offers a very accessible and reliable explanation of the three epistles. The English text used is the NIV, but fortunately the argument is based upon the (transliterated) Greek. There are 20 helpful supplementary notes. Despite the fact that it is more expensive than the alternatives, this commentary is a first buy for students and pastors.

[Ed: Although not a commentary, *Judith Lieu's volume on the theology of the Johannine Epistles in the New Testament Theology series published by Cambridge University Press (1991) may also be helpful to readers*]

## Grove Biblical Series

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This month's title (B47) is *The Bible Through Muslim Eyes: A Christian Response*, by Colin Chapman. Colin gives us a balanced and clear presentation of Muslim and Christian perspectives on the Bible which enables us to see important similarities and differences. Very useful for groups as well as for individuals!

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ISSN: 1365-6090