

## Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* is devoted to a relatively recent scholarly movement called the theological interpretation of scripture. During the past forty years an increasing number of scholars have become dissatisfied with many of the approaches to biblical interpretation common in the academy. Out of this foment a number of new interpretive movements began to establish themselves within the scholarly guild. Theological interpretation is one of these. Both Walter Moberly's essay and my own offer accounts of the concerns and tensions that provided the impetus for this movement.

Theological interpretation is not the dominant form of scholarly biblical interpretation, but it is now well established within the guild. There is a journal devoted to theological interpretation; several series seek to provide theological commentaries on books of the Bible; a number of groups within the Society of Biblical Literature are devoted to promoting theological interpretation. It is even the case that a disproportionately large number of scholars who work in this area are Episcopalians. Nevertheless, few parish clergy seem to be aware of this movement. Hence, I am especially pleased that this issue of the *ATR* is devoted to theological interpretation of scripture.

As a relatively recent arrival on the scholarly scene, there was a period of time when theological interpreters needed to engage in a period of self-definition. A part of this self-definition included a good deal of criticism of other more established interpretive methods, as well as rigorous marking of disciplinary boundaries. It is my view that such a period is now over. Theological interpretation of scripture is now an established practice within the academy. Like all established academic practices, the boundaries of theological interpretation should be contestable, flexible, and porous. There is little to be gained and much to be lost by doing anything else. I did not, therefore, want to devote much space in this volume to matters of self-definition.

Instead, I asked a number of people working in this area to write essays based on what they would like the church to know about theological interpretation. I wanted to include some established scholars, some less established scholars, as well as scholars who work outside

the United States. When the results came in, it became clear that the essays that comprise this volume display a rich variety in both perspective and subject matter.

**Walter Moberly** is one of the established scholars in this field. Over many years, his keen theological insight into the Old Testament combined with a thoughtful and irenic tone have made him one of the most influential voices in discussions about the theological interpretation of the Old Testament. It is important to have his voice in this volume because many of the issues and challenges facing theological interpreters are sharper with regard to those who work in the Old Testament. Highly technical OT scholarship, combined with dense historical debates about the history of ancient Israel, threaten to render the OT superfluous to contemporary theology, preaching, and parish life in general. As Moberly notes, “Modern scholarly criticism, while legitimate, can become arid. How then can one reengage existentially with the Bible in its classic significance—a place of encounter with God—without abandoning scholarly integrity?”

Keeping this tension in mind, Moberly covers a number of changes in the scholarly landscape that have opened the door to a reinvigorated theological approach to the OT that is also attentive to other scholarly concerns.

At the same time, Moberly is aware that some have taken the reemergence of theological interpretation of scripture as simply a way to reassert conservative dogma about scripture and its interpretation. In these hands, theological interpretation starts to look less like a paradigm shift and more like retrenchment. To exemplify this distinction, Moberly closes by offering an interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel.

My own contribution follows Moberly’s and can be read as a complement to and further development of his points regarding the emergence and establishment of the practices of theological interpretation of scripture. This essay spends more time than Moberly’s examining the institutional academic structures within which theological interpretation emerged. One reason I direct attention in this direction is to raise some questions about the future of theological interpretation. Now that it is established as an academic practice, how will future theological interpreters be formed? How will those whose primary tasks lie in preaching and teaching in parishes develop their own habits of theological interpretation? Rather than continuing fights over historical criticism and disciplinary self-definition, these

questions should be at the top of the agenda for theological interpreters of scripture.

**Susannah Ticciati** of King's College, London, is one of those younger scholars whose contributions to theological interpretation of scripture are already significant and will only become more so in the future. Her essay, "Anachronism or Illumination? Genesis 1 and Creation *ex nihilo*," deftly achieves what Moberly advocates in his essay: she engages an Old Testament text that is theologically significant. She fully recognizes, rather than ignores, the textual ambiguities and rough edges of Genesis 1 in addition to the challenges these pose to Christian theological approaches to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In particular, she addresses Catherine Keller's sharp criticisms of this doctrine. She then suggests "a conceptual-theological response, reconceiving and rehabilitating the logic of the doctrine." Finally, she provides "an exegetical-hermeneutical response, arguing against both Keller and her nemesis, Karl Barth, for the appropriateness of the doctrine as a hermeneutical rule, in the light of its ability to hold open the generative ambiguities of Genesis 1."

**Bungishabku Katho's** contribution focuses on Jeremiah 2:4–8. This passage is typical of many in Jeremiah where the Lord laments Israel's turn away from the Lord to serve idols and "things that do not profit." As he notes, "It is easy for a country to slowly but surely abandon its primary vision of justice, unity, love, and progress. . . . When the country abandons its vision and embraces vanity, it finally destroys the whole nation with its people." Jeremiah offers a diagnosis of what went wrong with Israel, and Katho seeks to understand how that diagnosis might provide a key for understanding his own situation. In short, Jeremiah's prophetic imagination is the guide for Katho's own prophetic imagination.

Jeremiah narrates how the people of God exchanged the powerful liberating Lord who led the people out of Egypt in favor of a domesticated, tame version of God, a god that can be taken for granted and ignored. As a result, what the people pursue in their life with God is ultimately *hevel* or vapor. Although Katho is focused on his African context, we would be foolish to think that Jeremiah's prophetic diagnosis is limited in its application to Africa. If we are to exercise a similar prophetic imagination, we may well see similar ways of domesticating God in favor of the pursuit of vapor in our own contexts.

Regular readers of the *ATR* will be familiar with the Practicing Theology section of each volume. In this issue there is a bit more

variety on display than is usual. **Rebekah Eklund's** contribution begins by taking up a suggestion common among theological interpreters that we should see faithful interpreters of the past as valuable conversation partners, rather than blunderers who failed to uncover the historical meaning of the text. In particular, she engages Gregory of Nyssa's account of the beatitudes. As she notes early in the essay, engaging an interpretive conversation partner does not oblige us to hold fast to everything that person says. "We can retrieve and be nourished by Gregory's reflections on the beatitudes in light of the fall and the *imago Dei* while placing them within a theological framework that has a more positive view of the role of the body and its desires."

Eklund shows that, for Gregory, the beatitudes reflect a ladder by which believers are invited to climb ever closer to God. As believers climb this ladder, they find that they are formed ever more into the perfected image of God. This process begins in our earthly life, but continues on after death. Within this basic structure Eklund is able to offer alternative and friendly amendments to Gregory's treatment. In the end, we are treated to a genuine exegetical conversation between past and present in which both parties are enriched.

**Jennie Grillo** offers a subtle and detailed analysis of the Greek additions to the book of Daniel, focusing on the story of Susanna in chapter 13. In the story, Susanna is subjected to a voyeuristic gaze of elders who seek to force themselves on her. Several feminist critics have noted that the narrative places the readers with the elders who subject Susannah to their gaze, rendering the assumed male readers complicit in the intended violence of the elders. At the same time Susanna is rather silent in the story. "Susanna is seen from all angles but repeatedly goes unheard."

Building on Rowan William's reflections on silence, Grillo offers a detailed reading of this chapter and its reception. She argues that Susanna's silence becomes transformed from the silence imposed on a victim into a tool of the innocent one, turning the tables on her oppressors. "The choice to be silent and to be seen might not be a position of subjection, but a posture with its own self-contained and sometimes numinous power."

**Nate Dawson's** contribution to this section is an intellectual memoir of how he was drawn into theological interpretation. This allows him to address criticisms of theological interpretation that he has encountered as his own spiritual journey has led him into the

Episcopal Church. Working through Dawson's essay serves to introduce readers to several key figures and debates within theological interpretation. They are presented, however, from the perspective of a student who is both discerning a call to ministry and engaged with how to integrate his theological study with rigorous biblical study.

This issue has two review articles. The first by **D. Christopher Spinks** serves to introduce readers to some of the variety of perspectives within the practice of theological interpretation of scripture. Christopher is an editor at Cascade Books. This brings him into contact with a number of wide-ranging scholarly conversations and debates. Thus, he is an excellent person to bring those familiar with theological interpretation of scripture up to date on the state of the conversation. In addition, for those who feel that this area of study is completely new territory, it might not be a bad idea to begin with Spinks's review essay and Nate Dawson's intellectual memoir to provide a context for situating the rest of the essays in this volume.

Finally, **Joshua Davis** has a review essay covering the work of Ephraim Radner, culminating with Radner's recent book, *Time and the Word*. Although Radner's name is not often mentioned in discussions of theological interpretation, I often rely on his contributions in my work. Without question, one of the ongoing challenges theological interpreters face as they move into the future concerns the nature, shape, and practice of figural reading. Although many engaged in this field will agree in principle with the need to rethink modernity's dismissal of figural reading, there is a great deal remaining to be done when it comes to thinking about how to do this in the present. As Davis's essay indicates, almost all of Radner's prolific scholarly output touches on these issues in one way or another. Without question, Davis's account is critical, but he is not dismissive. Those of us engaged in theological interpretation will need to account both for Radner's work and Davis's criticisms.

I was deeply honored to be asked to be the guest editor for this volume of the *ATR*. I knew that working with Jackie Winter, Ellen Wondra, Jason Fout, Travis Ables, and all the other people who make the *ATR* happen would be a great pleasure. I and they are particularly grateful for those whose financial gifts have supported this issue of *ATR*. Like all guest editors, I invited people to write in great hope that they would meet their deadlines and produce wonderful work. Inevitably, as one waits for the submissions to arrive, hope is replaced

by anxiety. Now that I have seen all the essays, I want to express my deep gratitude to the contributors to this volume. They offer the *ATR* readers a rich feast of theological insight and exegetical imagination. As usual, my anxiety was wasted.

STEPHEN E. FOWL  
*Guest Editor*