

❖ Other Voices ❖

Apply the whole of yourself to the text [of Scripture], and apply the whole of the text to yourself.

JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL (1687-1752)

Holy Scripture is not a single or simple entity. The term 'Holy Scripture' refers primarily to a set of texts, but importantly and secondarily to its divine origin and its use by the church. Thus the content of the term can only be thoroughly mapped by seeing this set of texts in connection with purposive divine action in its interaction with an assemblage of creaturely events, communities, agents, practices and attitudes. ... 'Holy Scripture' is a shorthand term for the nature and function of the biblical writings in a set of communicative acts which stretch from God's merciful self-manifestation to the obedient hearing of the community of faith.

JOHN WEBSTER , *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch (2003)*

[Scripture] texts must first be restored to their historical locus and interpreted in their historical context. But this must be followed by a second phase of interpretation, however, in which they must also be seen in light of the entire historical movement and in terms of the central event of Christ.

**CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER (POPE BENEDICT XVI) ,
"Biblical Interpretation in Conflict: On the Foundations and the Itinerary of Exegesis Today"
(2008)**

I read the Bible as a sacred text and a witness to Jesus Christ; a site of God's self-revelation; a text from the past through which God addresses all humanity and each human being today; a text that has overarching unity yet is internally teeming with rich diversity; a text that encodes meanings and refracts them in multiple ways; a text we should approach with trust and critical judgment as well as engage with receptivity and imagination; a text that defines Christian identity yet speaks to people beyond the boundaries of Christian communities.

MIROSLAV VOLF , *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection (2010)*

The early Church read the Old Testament as the Word of God, a book about the triune God...who "was and is and is to come." What the text of

the Bible meant when it was written, as far as that can be determined, is part of interpretation, but it can never be the last word, nor even the most important word. A historical interpretation can only be preparatory. A Christian understanding of the Scriptures is oriented toward the living Christ revealed through the words of the Bible, toward what the text means today in the lives of the faithful and what it promises for the future.

ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN, *“Introduction to the Christian Interpretation of Isaiah,” in Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators, The Church’s Bible*

The *unease* one feels in reading patristic exegesis should not be mistaken for *disease*, though, on the part either of the contemporary reader or the ancient exegetes. It is precisely because patristic exegesis does not seem comfortably familiar that it promises to have something to offer us. This unease ought not to be a deterrent, a road sign warning “Turn back now; waste of time ahead.” Rather, I would suggest, the unease that reading patristic exegesis occasions...is what it feels like to put on someone else’s clothes – not those cut and measured to one’s own dimensions and liking but garments that have been handed down, and into which one must wear one’s own way. These are the garments of the Christian tradition.

CLAIRE MATHEWS MCGINNIS, *“Stumbling over the Testaments: On Reading Patristic Exegesis and the Old Testament in Light of the New,” Journal of Theological Interpretation 4:1 (2010)*

Like other spiritual practices, formative reading [of Scripture] is less a question of strict methods and more a matter of attitudinal dispositions. Turning to the text in the initial act of reading, we pray that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts and enlighten our minds so that we may imbibe, beyond information, the formative meanings disclosed in the text, reading, so to speak, “between the lines” and remaining receptive to the ways in which the Holy Spirit can use the power of the word to touch and transform our lives. We abandon the potentially arrogant position of being a textual expert and become a disciple who not only reads but also prays with these words, who hears them not only in an auditory manner but also with the ears of the heart. The fruits of this being-with-and-in-the-text flow forth in our actions; it becomes second nature to “consider our state of soul, and reflect in our own deeds the lives about which we read so often and so eagerly.”

... [W]e should not expect to receive direction every time we read. If it pleases the Spirit to test our faithfulness to reading in the midst of aridity, we should not give up. We should realize that the work of the Holy Spirit might go unnoticed for long stretches of time. It is not there at once, but it ripens in us like fruit on a tree. Just as its leafy branches need sufficient sunlight for the fruit to blossom, so do we need to remain faithful to the practice of spiritual reading until that day when the words we read light

up for us with formative-inspirational beauty. Scriptures that were perhaps lacking in meaning for many years may now strike us as immediately significant for our lives. The initiative for such encounters rests with God alone. We cannot force or compel them; we can only wait in loving attention.

SUSAN MUTO, *“The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading: Revisiting Holy Scripture with Humble Receptivity,”* *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* (2012)

Phrases are powerful instruments of awakening and recollection for all of us. The wisdom of the ancient Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* or “holy reading” lies in focusing not on an idea or even a sentence, but on a “word or phrase” that summons us to attention. Learning to notice what we notice as we move slowly from words to meaning, pausing where we sense a slight beckoning, allowing associations to emerge around the phrase that stopped us is an act of faith that the Spirit will meet us there. There is, we may assume, a gift to be received wherever we are stopped and summoned. At one reading of the prologue to John’s Gospel, it may be that “In the beginning” allows us a moment to step outside time and revel in a cosmic awe that brings with it the comfort that we are not stuck in the morass of human history, but belong to a much bigger story. At another reading of the same passage, it may be the simple phrase “with God” that gives us occasion to consider the mystery of divine companionship that is an aspect of God’s very being.

MARILYN CHANDLER McENTYRE, *What’s in a Phrase? Pausing Where Scripture Gives You Pause* (2014)

It is not too much to say that the one thing other than belief in Jesus Christ that unites Christians more than any other is the Bible. It is also one of the greatest sources of division and controversy. Scripture unites Christians in that anyone who calls herself a Christian is not free simply to dismiss the Bible as irrelevant. She may quarrel with it, investigate it, and emphasize some parts over others, but she may never simply say, “I am going to do Christian ethics without the Bible.” To be a Christian is to be in conversation with the biblical text. The fact that Christians (as well as Jews and Muslims) are referred to as a “people of the book” reflects the fact that Scripture stands as the bedrock of the Christian life. The Bible can never be simply dismissed as irrelevant or peripheral.

KYLE D. FEDLER, *Exploring Christian Ethics: Biblical Foundations for Morality* (2006)

Throughout most of the Christian exegetical tradition, the Bible has been read as a document reiterating the morally stupendous claim that all reality is created and remade by God’s overflowing goodness. To take this claim seriously is to give up the attempt to fit the Bible into a preconceived moral

universe and to begin, instead, to wrestle with the methodological questions raised by the moral strangeness of this basic claim. It is an unfamiliar starting point, and it will yield unfamiliar methodological presuppositions. But if those who take the Bible's moral strangeness seriously look quixotic from the vantage point of modern readers, they in turn see modern readers as self-insulated travelers who, despite being physically present in foreign lands, are impoverished by reading everything through the categories and perceptions of their home culture.

BRIAN BROCK, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (2007)

The Christian community has long asserted the unity of the Testaments and acknowledged multiple senses of Scripture, although the nature of that unity and of those senses has been a matter of debate. Particularly in the present postmodern, pluralist context in which contemporary biblical scholarship occurs, reading the Bible theologically means having to grapple anew with how we hear the OT's discrete witness, in light of what we know of God in Christ. Sensitive to the fact that the Hebrew Bible has an ongoing life and tradition of interpretation within Judaism, the challenge is how to avoid supercessionism in our ways of thinking and speaking of the OT without stripping Christianity of its claims to revelation of God in Christ.

CLAIRE MATHEWS MCGINNIS, "*Stumbling over the Testaments: On Reading Patristic Exegesis and the Old Testament in Light of the New*," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4:1 (2010)

When asked to name the books that come to mind when they consider sacred literature or holy books, Americans overwhelmingly name the Bible (79%). ... Boomers (ages 49 to 67) and Elders (ages 68 plus) are more likely to regard the Bible as sacred. Millennials (18 to 29) are the least likely generational segment to regard the Bible as sacred literature. Additionally, Millennials (18-29) are more likely than average to say they do not consider any book sacred or holy (19%) or are unable to name a book that is sacred or holy (10%). ...

The total proportion of Bible readers — that is, those who read the Bible at least three to four times a year — is 53%. Fifteen percent of adults say they read the Bible daily. Another 13% spend time in Scripture several times per week; 9% read it once a week; 8% read the Bible once a month; and 8% read it three to four times a year. ...

Bible readers were presented with a list of possible reasons for reading the Bible. More than half (56%) say that reading it brings them closer to God. Far fewer spend time in Scripture because they have a problem they need to solve or need direction (17%) or need comfort (15%).

BARNA GROUP FOR THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY,
The State of the Bible 2014