
The theme of this book is “the use of the Christian scriptures in Christian theology” (p. 1). The authors elaborate ten principles for passing from the biblical texts to theological positions in systematic theology and illustrate their application in several key areas of doctrine.

Chapter one has two sections. The first section (pp.7-19) summarizes the authors’ major presuppositions concerning the origins of the scriptures and their interpretation in the past and present. The scriptures possess a normative authority for Christians because they are the witness, effected by the Holy Spirit, to the foundational revelation and foundational tradition that reached its climax with Christ and his apostles.

The scriptures, then, possess an authority which is “not
merely *de facto* and based simply on the way they effectively function now in shaping life and teaching for the community of faith.” The scriptures possess “a *de jure* authority that legitimately commands permanent loyalty and is derived from a foundational and authoritative past.” (p. 9)

However, “The divine authority and revelatory power imparted to the scriptures through the charism of inspiration” does not dispense the reader from “the task of establishing the meaning intended by the human authors.” The charism of inspiration did not bypass the natural talents and limitations of the biblical writers. The Holy Spirit acted in and through the free activity of these finite agents, without eliminating their individual characteristics and relative autonomy. “The word of God came and comes to us in and through the words of human beings; that is to say, in a medium that is historically and culturally conditioned.” The reader, therefore, must carefully endeavor to understand the biblical sense: “the meaning(s) intended by the human authors of these texts—that is to say, what they intended to communicate and ‘fixed’ in their texts when they chose to write this and not that for the specific audiences and situations they had in mind.” (p. 14)

In the patristic age, “besides being ‘canonized’ or acknowledged as belonging to the normative list of inspired scriptures, the biblical texts gained a life of their own, a ‘reception history’, as they distanced themselves from their human authors, entered new contexts, and found later readers (and hearers).” In the post-NT dependent phase of revelation, the Holy Spirit, who once and for all inspired the scriptures in the foundational phase of revelation, has continued to guide the interpretation and use of the scriptures in the liturgy, preaching, catechesis, theology and the whole life of the church (pp.14-15).

The interpretation of the scriptures today involves a contribution of the reader in activating the potential meaning(s)
of the text produced by the sacred writer. "Over and over again meaning occurs as readers discover, liberate, and re-create the sense of the text in (and to some extent from) their own contexts." The original authors have passed away, but "their communicative intentions created normative texts which have enjoyed a long history of fruitful interpretations and actualization before reaching present-day interpreters." (p. 16)

When contemporary readers of the scriptures - in particular theological readers - seek to appropriate biblical texts by establishing their meaning and truth," they should do this "within the community of faith and out of a faith that the one Holy Spirit ... both inspired the writing of the scriptures and has guided their living interpretation." (p. 16)

The second section (pp.19-39) of chapter one presents and briefly explains ten specific principles for receiving and appropriating the scriptures in systematic theology. They are the following:

1. The Principle of Faithful Hearing. "The scriptures require theologians to be faithful and regular hearers of the inspired text." (p.6) Faithful hearers of the Word are "oriented primarily toward the scriptural texts rather than toward themselves, and primarily responsive to the meaning they discover rather than to the meaning they construct and create for themselves." In this way, they respect the divine revelation's absolute priority over all human opinions and judgments. They read the Bible "with consent (and not with suspicion)"and with the anticipation that, originating from "the infinitely true, good, and beautiful God, it may say something to them that they have never heard before." (p.19)

2. The Principle of Active Hearing. "Theologians are active, critically self-aware interpreters of the scriptures, appropriating them within the contexts of prayer, study and action." (p. 38)
3. The Principle of the Community and its Creeds. "The scriptures call for a theological interpretation and appropriation within the living community of faith and in the light of its classical creeds." (p. 6) From the time of St Irenaeus, "creeds have been taken not as substitutes for the scriptures but as essential and normative frames of reference guiding theological understanding and interpretation within the mainline tradition." (p. 23) Because religious truth-claims are essentially related to a religious way of life, "the truth claims of the scriptures cannot be systematically clarified unless they are also related to the Christian community's cumulative tradition of interpreting and 'performing' the scriptures." (p. 24)

4. The Principle of Biblical Convergence. "Convergent biblical testimony can bear on the theological questions being examined." (p. 6) "The principle of convergence entails letting the broadest and most varied amount of biblical witness come to bear on the theological question at issue." (p. 24)

5. The Principle of Exegetical Consensus. "Where available, the consensus of centrist exegesis guides systematic theology." (p. 6)

6. The Principle of Metathemes and Metanarratives. "Theological appropriation of the Bible takes account of the metathemes and metanarratives." (p. 7) "There are single themes (e.g. covenant, prophecy, and wisdom) and extended narratives (above all the resurrection of the crucified Jesus) that rise above their original settings and recur, with appropriate developments and modifications, in new context." (p. 27) This sixth principle "aims at noting the existence of patterns of divine activity and promise that recur in the Bible, yield an overall picture, evoke varying human responses, and throw light above all, on Jesus' activity and identity." (p. 28)

7. The Principle of Continuity within Discontinuity. "Various discontinuities within continuities affect the theological 'tak-
ing over’ of the Bible.” (p. 7) “The Easter event, with the move it brought from the situation of Jesus to that of Paul, stands as the classic exemplification of our seventh principle.” (p. 31) The Easter event “does not invalidate what has preceded it, but it does entail newly interpreting everything prior to it and recognizing the great Easter gift (the Holy Spirit) and new family created by Christ’s resurrection and power of divine love (the church).” (pp. 30-31)

8. **The Principle of Eschatological Provisionality.** “Their eschatological provisionality regulates the theological use of the scriptures.” (p. 7) “The mysterious fullness of glory to come invites us to acknowledge steadily the partial, provisional, and anticipatory nature of even the best insights to be drawn from the scriptures about the tripersonal God and the world of grace in which we live today.” (p. 31)

9. **The Principle of Philosophical Assistance.** “The passage from the Bible to theology takes place in dialogue with philosophy.” (p. 7) “Our ninth principle states that theology will remain low on clarity and substance unless it puts the scriptures into dialogue with philosophy . . . In general, philosophical reason sharpens the questions to be asked, helps to organise the methods and material, partly illuminates the condition of human beings and their world, and brings conceptual clarity to bear on the biblical texts, which by and large are prephilosophical.” (pp. 31-32). In addition, philosophy deals with “questions about the status of religious language. Does such language merely reflect and express our inner experience? Or can both literal and metaphorical statements about God yield true knowledge?” (p. 32)

10. **The Principle of Inculturation.** “The task of inculturation helps to shape any theological appropriation of the scriptures.” (p. 7) “Theologians need . . . the intellectual and spiritual courage to inculturate the biblical testimony and let their theology
become enriched by different cultures.” This “calls for a deep knowledge of cultural experiences and for innovative fidelity.” (p. 33) “Such attention to inculturation implies both faith and reason: both (1) a faith to believe that as the Word and Wisdom of God, Christ is present at least seminally and anonymously in all human cultures, and that, as centered on him, the Bible is the book for all cultures, and (2) a sensitive mind to discern and fashion the way inculturation should function for any given period, people, and language.” (p. 34)

Chapter one argues only briefly for these ten principles for the theological use of scripture. The authors believe their validity will come to light more clearly when it is seen how they work in practice when applied to major theological issues in systematic theology. This application is made in the subsequent chapters with the goal of “offering some guidelines for those who wish to cross the bridge from the Bible to systematic theology.” (p. 153) To test the principles, major controverted questions have been chosen in Christology, soteriology, the doctrine of God, and ecclesiology.

Chapter two (pp. 40-52) brings the ten principles to bear on the use of the scriptures in elaborating theologically the divinity of Christ, in dialogue, when appropriate, with John Hick and the Jesus Seminar.

Chapter three (pp. 53-73) asks how the scriptures should be appropriated in treating the nature of the redemption Christ has brought; more specifically: How did/does Christ perform his redeeming role? "Is it primarily by liberating us, by expiating our sins, or by loving us?" The authors want to maintain the preeminence of love as the premier statement of the "how" of redemption. Love is both the motive and the force at work in redemption. This position is tested and verified by the application of the ten principles. Particular attention is given to the dialogue with philosophies of love (principle nine) and to the challenge of inculturation of the message of divine love in
our times (principle ten).

Chapter four (pp. 74-100) turns to the doctrine of the trinity and brings the ten principles to bear on current proposals for renaming the Godhead, avoiding the masculine name of "Son" for the second person of the trinity, and avoiding talk of "the Father." A first section (pp. 75-78) investigates how an application of the ten principles might support a case for change. It is noted that probably inculturation (principle ten) presses most for a revisionary translation of the NT language about God as Father.

In a second section (pp. 78-92) the case for keeping "God the Father" is made by the use of the same ten principles in dialogue, where appropriate, with Elizabeth A Johnson and Sallie McFague. The application of the ninth principle in a philosophical reflection on the function of "Father" as a metaphor for God is especially illuminating. By way of summary, the authors conclude that the ten principles, "when used to monitor various moves from the scriptures to trinitarian theology, indicate that the three names of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' do not allow for substitutes. These particular metaphors, while not exclusive, enjoy a normative, irreplaceable status in naming the Christian God and organizing the basic beliefs of Christianity: they convey insights, fix historical references, and facilitate relationships that are unobtainable from other metaphors." (p. 92)

A third and final section (pp. 93-100) of chapter four discusses the use of Scripture in developing a systematic pneumatology. The key themes here are: the personal character of the Holy Spirit, revealed and experienced in relationship (but not confusion) with the risen Christ and the Father; the "emergence" of the Spirit within the eternal life of the trinity; the functions of the Spirit in the "economic" mission.

Chapter five (pp. 101-116) asks what the scriptures indicate about the structure (or relative lack of structure) of the founda-
tional church that Jesus and his first disciples left behind. "Do the scriptures, when interpreted in the light of the ten principles, support the conclusion that Christian life and ministry should be utterly egalitarian" (as, for example, Sallie McFague claims in *Models of God*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987)? "Or do the scriptures, when so interpreted, vouch for what has been the belief of most mainline Christians: namely, that the basic discipleship and wholeness of all also need particular ministries, which include the hierarchical leadership of some that is handed on to successive generations?" (pp. 103-104)

Chapter six (pp.117-130) treats an issue of considerable significance for inner-Christian dialogue and unity: the Petrine ministry. What do the scriptures disclose concerning God's designs for the function of Peter? The chapter limits the discussion to the place of Peter at the start of Christianity and uses the Petrine function as a fifth case for applying the ten principles for the theological appropriation of the scriptures. The authors are aware of separating themselves from the customary approach both of those who champion this ministry and of those who minimize it. They hold that the witness to the resurrection of the crucified Jesus offers the preferable key for interpreting and explaining the Petrine ministry. Particularly noteworthy is the value of principle nine and the philosophical contribution for a clearer, theological statement of what witness to the resurrection entails.

Chapter seven (pp.131-139) is entitled: "On Not Misusing the Ministry of Jesus." It addresses a recent phenomenon found among theologians both on the left and on the right: the appeal to the pre-Easter Jesus as if this were the only or practically the only way to verify and legitimate what we may know and believe as Christians. This unilateral privileging of Jesus' ministry tacitly presumes that nothing is revealed in the post-Easter situation and plays down the role of the Spirit in illuminating the apostolic generation as to the meaning and implications of what they have experienced of Jesus (cf Jn 14:26; 16:13-15). It "can hardly be compatible with hearing
all the scriptures (principle one), biblical convergence (principle four), metathemes and metanarratives (principle six) and continuity-in-discontinuity (principle seven)." (p.131)

Chapter eight (pp. 140-152) documents the tasks that texts, translations, and commentaries impose on systematic theologians.

Chapter nine (pp. 153-162) is a review and a critical assessment of what has been written. It emphasizes again the scope of the work. It then goes back over the ten principles, reflecting critically on them and their applications, responding to questions and criticisms raised by readers of the manuscript.

The book concludes with "An Appendix on the Holy Spirit" (pp.163-169). This appendix seeks to clarify the double activity traditionally attributed to the Holy Spirit: (1) that of inspiring the composition of the scriptures and (2) that of illuminating their appropriation in successive reading communities. Reasons are also given for regarding this double activity as "proper" to the Spirit.

This is an important book. As the authors point out, biblical studies and theology are normally taught separately. "Courses exploring the theological use of the Bible seem remarkably rare, if not nonexistent. Our book aims to meet that need by proposing some principles for passing from biblical texts to theological positions" (p.153) and by giving examples of how this passage may be negotiated in practice. This specific focus sets the work apart from other books and articles which give general descriptions of various uses of Scripture in theology. I highly recommend this book to systematic theologians, teachers and students of Christian theology.

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