

REVIEWS & NOTICES



Christopher J. H. Wright

The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006)

Canonical exegesis, which insists that individual biblical texts be read in the light of the whole canon, has restored the Church's original sense that these texts form a single "book" that tells of God's plan for humanity revealed in Jesus Christ. In other words, this school of exegesis has returned us to the guiding assumptions of the earliest Christian interpreters—namely, that there is a unified, "grand narrative" to the Bible.

Acknowledging that, however, the question then becomes: how do we best characterize that narrative; what does the Bible, taken as a whole, intend to tell us? Christopher Wright has written a big book that seeks to answer that question in two words—*missio Dei*, the mission of God. For Wright, the Bible tells the story of God's mission in history. What is that mission? To bestow his divine blessing on the nations of the world through a people he elected and called to be his special possession—first, Israel, and later the "new Israel," the Church.

This is not a book that seeks to articulate the biblical foundations of the Church's mission to evangelize the world. It is rather something more ambitious—a "missional hermeneutic of the Bible." Wright proposes that the divine mission of blessing is the hermeneutical key for understanding and interpreting the content and unity of Scripture. Thus, he uses this divine mission as the interpretative matrix through which to look at such foundational biblical themes as monotheism, creation, humanity, election, covenant, ethics, and future hope.

Wright roots his "missiological hermeneutic" in the foundational preaching of the New Testament Church. He calls attention to Jesus' own post-resurrection interpretation of "everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms"—that is, in the entire Old Testament. "Thus is written," Jesus said, not only that the Messiah would suffer and rise, but that repentance would be preached in his name "to all the nations" (Luke 24:44–47). St. Paul, too, in his speech to King Agrippa, likewise reads the Old Testament as foretelling a mission to the nations: "The prophets and Moses said that the Christ would 'proclaim light both to the people [Israel] and to the Gentiles'" (Acts 26:22–23).

Following the teaching of Jesus, the New Testament Church read the Old Testament as proclaiming the universal mission of God, according to Wright. At the

heart of that divine mission is the call of Abraham and the subsequent Abrahamic covenants, which promise that through Abraham's seed the families of the earth shall be blessed. In his close reading of the Abrahamic materials, Wright helps us to hear an original hermeneutic of the New Testament writers, who believed the Gospel was "preached ... beforehand to Abraham" (Gal. 3:8). Wright draws subtle canonical connections between the account of Abraham's call in Genesis 12 and the primordial history that goes before it in Genesis 1–11, underlining the "new creation" that Abraham represents.

The primordial history culminated in the sin of the tower builders at Babel. Wright notices that, as the people at Babel sought to "make a name" for themselves apart from God, God promises to make Abraham's "name" great (Gen. 11:4; 12:2). Wright sees this echo between the texts as "undoubtedly deliberate." In addition, he notes that the Babel narrative five times repeats the expression "the whole earth" (Gen. 11:1, 4, 8, 9), while similar language is used in God's promise that Abraham will be a blessing for "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3).

Wright also sees the importance of the "sequence of covenants" in the Old Testament as giving shape and direction to the divine mission entrusted to Abraham, and the biblical narrative. He rightly identifies the central significance of the covenant with David—especially for the New Testament authors' understanding of the Church's mission. He describes the New Testament's vision this way:

[I]n the resurrection of the Messiah, the promised restoration of David's kingdom and rebuilding of the Temple had also taken place. But since the Davidic Messiah would be king for all nations, and the Davidic Temple would be a house of prayer for all nations, the restoration of these things must now move forward to their appointed purpose—the ingathering of the nations as the subjects of his kingdom and the stones in his Temple. The resurrection of Jesus is not just the fulfillment of [the] words of David in the psalms, it is also the restoration of the reign and Temple of David, no longer for ethnic Israel only but for all nations.

Wright also senses that there is a liturgical consummation to the Scripture's grand narrative, marshalling a copious array of Scriptures that speak of all the nations worshipping the God of Israel.

Ultimately, however, Wright's interpretative framework does not provide the full explanatory power that it might. One can agree that the *missio Dei*—what St. Irenaeus and other early interpreters called the "economy of salvation"—forms the narrative of Scripture. And Wright helps us to see that the mission of God, his plan of salvation, is a plan for the blessing of the nations. But Wright does not provide an adequate explanation of either the nature of the blessing that God seeks

to bestow on the nations or how he intends that blessing to be communicated to all the families of the world.

The New Testament answer would seem to be clear. St. Paul and St. John speak of the blessing in terms of divine filiation—eternal life as children of God and heirs of Abraham. Believers receive this blessing through the sacramental economy of the Church, that is, through baptism and the Eucharist. The Word of the Gospel is intended to culminate in the sacrament by which the Word is actualized in the life of the believer. This is what Christ commanded and this is what we see the apostolic Church doing over and over again: preaching the Gospel and baptizing those who repent and believe in the Gospel. By this movement of Word and sacrament, they are made children of God and incorporated into the Church, the “new Israel,” described as the family or household of God and entrusted with carrying out the mission of God until the end of the age.

Wright, who is the author of the very helpful *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (1995), here too displays his impressive command of biblical motifs and intertextual connections. Yet perhaps because of Wright’s own evangelical presuppositions, he never provides a coherent explanation of the identity of the Church, its relation to the kingdom preached by Jesus, or the relation of the Church to the divine mission. It is also to be regretted that not once in this more than 500-page book does he discuss baptism, the Eucharist, or the sacramental economy.



Aidan Nichols, O.P.

*Lovely Like Jerusalem: The Fulfillment of the Old Testament
in Christ and the Church*
(San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007)

Aidan Nichols has written a first-rate introduction to the Old Testament canon and its interpretation in the New Testament and early Christian tradition. His comments on each individual book of the Old Testament are perceptive and insightful. His point throughout is that without a strong knowledge of these books, the fullness of the Gospel can never be understood; nor is it possible to grasp the meaning of “the entire divine plan that stretches between, and over, the two testaments.”

Along the way, in a measured, non-polemical fashion, Nichols takes up hot-button scholarly issues such as the hypothesis that the Bible’s first five books, the Pentateuch, had four original “sources”: J (the Yahwist writer), E (the Elohist), D (the Deuteronomist), and P (the Priestly).

Taking up such matters, Nichols is consistently fair in laying out the arguments before weighing in with his own opinions, which tend towards the more conservative scholarly camps. For instance, he identifies some weaknesses in the JEDP theory, and goes on to make a good case for "the immense antiquity of the source material in Genesis." He also argues for a tenth-century B.C. dating of the whole Pentateuch, which, in his opinion, reflects "ancient traditions, the nucleus of which goes back to Moses."

In his treatment of modern New Testament scholarship, Nichols takes aim at the pervasive influence of what he calls "a resurgence of the heresy of Marcion," the second-century teacher who wanted to cast off the Old Testament as completely incompatible with the New Testament. Critiquing the neo-Marcionite assumptions in such crucial figures in modern exegesis as Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann, he argues forcefully that the New Testament cannot be read apart from the Old, anymore than the Old can be read apart from the New. On this point, he quotes Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI: "For the Christian, the Old Testament represents, in its totality, an advance towards Christ. ... Hence we only interpret an individual text correctly ... when we see it as a way that is leading us ever forward, when we see in the text where this way is tending and what its inner direction is."

Nichols believes that "the messianic hope, broadly conceived," is the unifying theme of the Old and New Testaments. And his treatment of this theme is marked by a timely retrieval of the underappreciated twentieth-century Anglican, A. G. Herbert, especially his book, *The Throne of David: A Study of the Fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ and his Church* (1941).

The messianic hope that animates the Bible is expressed in various biblical subthemes. Nichols studies these: the gift of the Spirit, the restoration of Paradise, the faithful remnant of the people, the bride of the Lord, the new covenant, the servant of the Lord, the Son of David, the new Temple, and the homecoming to Mount Zion. He is especially strong in identifying God's "universalist" intentions in the election of Israel and the influence of this universal mission on the self-understanding of the New Testament Church.

Nichols aptly describes his own approach to the sacred page as "a markedly ecclesial exegesis." By that he means a "typological" exegesis that reflects the manner of interpretation found within the Bible and carried forward into the Church's liturgy and the teachings of the Church Fathers. To illustrate this brand of ecclesial exegesis, he turns first to Jean Cardinal Daniélou's classic treatments (in *From Shadows to Reality* [1960]) of the christological and sacramental typologies of Adam's sleep, Noah and the flood, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the Exodus. Nichols then provides chapter-length studies of St. Augustine's exegesis of Genesis, St. Gregory the Great's reading of the Book of Job; Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs; and Thomas Aquinas' rendering of the Torah.

Describing this great tradition, Nichols concludes:

The fundamental promise-fulfillment format of the Bible is why the kind of exegesis we call “typological” best befits its unique genius. That is something recognized within Scripture itself, since in the Old Testament the prophets interpret typologically the founding events of the history of Israel, and in the New Testament, the various inspired writers interpret typologically both the ancient Old Testament history and the comments on that history made by the writing prophets. The Fathers of the Church will continue this typological reading of the Bible, which was found in the official catechesis taught by the bishops, notably to those preparing for Christian initiation by baptism, chrismation (or confirmation), and first Holy Communion. Indeed, such typological exegesis is the chosen method of understanding Scripture found in the liturgy itself.



Robert Louis Wilken, trans. and ed.

Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators,
The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007)

Prior to his conversion, St. Augustine asked St. Ambrose which books of the Bible he should read. Ambrose told him to read Isaiah. Why? Ambrose never explained, but Augustine later surmised it was because Isaiah “more clearly than others ... foretold the Gospel and the calling of the Gentiles.”

The Book of Isaiah has long been regarded in the Church as a sort of “fifth gospel.” Already in the New Testament, we can readily see its importance for understanding the person and mission of Jesus. St. Jerome called Isaiah “an evangelist and apostle” and said his prophecy “contains all the mysteries of the Lord.” St. Isidore of Seville was able to create a little book on the life of Christ that was composed entirely of citations from Isaiah.

Thus, the arrival of the *Isaiah* volume in Robert Louis Wilken's The Church's Bible series is truly an important and welcome event. Drawing from more than fifty ecclesial writers, as well as from ancient liturgies, Church councils, and manuals, Wilken has woven a grand catena of Christian commentary and interpretation on the Greek text of Isaiah.

As Wilken notes in his finely observed introduction, Isaiah is not only important for understanding the Gospel—the prophet’s words have also become part of the daily worship of the Church. The “Holy, Holy, Holy” that Catholics sing in every Mass (also known as the *sanctus* or *trisagion* [lit. thrice-holy]), comes from Isaiah’s vision of the Temple of heaven and the throne of God (Isa. 6:3; compare Rev. 4:8). The scene of the seraphim purifying Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal (Isa. 6:6–7) is interpreted in the Syriac liturgy as a sign of the Eucharist; before communion, the priest declares to the faithful: “The propitiary live coal of the Body and Blood of Christ our God is given to the true believer for the pardon of offenses and the forgiveness of sins forever.”

The liturgical appropriation of Isaiah is part of a broader interpretative tradition that only begins in the New Testament. “[I]t was only as Christians lived the book, heard it read in public worship, sang its ‘canticles’ (for example, Isa. 12:1–6), pondered its words and images, and debated difficult passages, that its fuller meaning was uncovered,” Wilkens writes. “The actual text of Isaiah is the beginning of what Isaiah means for Christians, not the ending.”

In bringing us the fruits of this interpretative tradition, Wilken presents an English translation of the Septuagint text along with citations of the text in the New Testament and generous selections from the four complete commentaries on Isaiah that survive from antiquity—those of Eusebius, Jerome, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Theodoret of Cyrus. He also gathers shorter reflections on the text by commentators ranging from the well-known, such as Origen, to the relatively obscure likes of Venantius Fortunatus, a seventh-century Latin poet and hymn writer.

The result is a commentary of rare breadth, offering fresh exegetical and spiritual insights. To point out just a few examples: There is a beautiful meditation on baptism by St. Gregory of Nyssa in which he connects Isaiah’s oft-quoted lines about the foundation stone to be laid in Zion with the story of Jacob’s well (Gen. 29):

For from earliest times it was by means of water that salvation came to someone who was perishing. ... When Jacob was looking for a bride, he met Rachel unexpectedly at the well. A great stone was placed over the well, and it required many shepherds to roll it away to provide water for them and their flocks. Jacob, however, moves the stone away by himself and waters the flocks of his betrothed. This stone is a type pointing to what is to come. For what is the stone lying over the well but Christ himself? For of him Isaiah says: “I will lay for the foundation of Zion a stone that is precious, costly, chosen” (Isa. 28:16). And Daniel also says: “A stone was cut without hands” (Dan. 2:34, 45). ... Over the well then, was lying the spiritual stone Christ, concealing in the

depth of the mystery the washing of regeneration that needed much time—one might say a long rope—to bring it to light. And no one was able to move the stone except Israel [Jacob], who signifies the mind that sees God. He draws up the water and also gives drink to the sheep of Rachel. That is, he reveals the hidden mystery and gives water to the flock of the Church.

Elsewhere, Isaiah's reference to "a plan formed of old" (Isa. 25:1) is taken by Cyril of Alexandria to evoke "the mystery of the incarnation" referred to in Ephesians 1:9–10 ("a plan for the fullness of time"). He goes on to read Isaiah's prophecy of the redeemed drinking wine on God's holy mountain (Isa. 25:6, 9–10) as a reference to the Church and the Eucharist.

Wine refers to the mystical oblation, to the unbloody sacrifice which we celebrate in the churches. ... For his plan is for all peoples. ... They confess that "God will give rest on this mountain" (Isa. 25:10). It seems to me that here, mountain refers to the Church, for it is there that one finds rest. For we heard the words of Christ: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

And commenting on the passage of the seraphim and the burning coal (Isa. 6), Origen is moved to eucharistic prayer: "Bring down from the heavenly altar, O Lord, tongs carrying a burning coal to touch my lips, for if the tongs of the Lord touch my lips, they will be cleansed! And if the Lord cleanses my lips and burns out my faults ... the Word of God will be in my mouth and no unclean word will escape my lips."

We are witnessing a tremendous period of patristic retrieval and revival. Eerdmans' *The Church's Bible* series now has volumes on Isaiah, Corinthians, and the Song of Songs. *InterVarsity's Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series has published volumes covering almost all of the biblical canon (to date, all but Psalms 1–50 and Jeremiah and Lamentations). In this volume, Wilken has made an important contribution to that ongoing revival, giving us a treasure trove for future scholarship, prayer, and homiletics.



Cornelius a Lapse, S. J.

Commentary on the Four Gospels, 4 vols.

(Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2008; available from www.loretopubs.org)

Cornelius a Lapse, S. J. (1568–1637) is a giant figure in the history of Catholic biblical interpretation. Born in a tiny Catholic enclave in the Calvinist Netherlands in the bloody generation after the Reformation, Lapse grew to be one of the Church's most gifted scholars and spiritual interpreters of the sacred page.

Ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1595, he became a spell-binding lecturer in Scripture and Hebrew, first at Louvain and later at the Roman College. He was known for weaving in topical allusions and references to classical literature, philosophy, and history, along with quotations from the Church Fathers and insights into the Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts. These were also characteristics of his writing, which was nothing short of prodigious. Between 1614 and 1645, Lapse wrote commentaries on every book of Scripture except Job and Psalms.

Yet despite his historical importance, Lapse today is largely unknown. His works have long been out of print and hard to find; many remain untranslated. Loreto Publications has now published the first complete translation of his commentaries on the four gospels as the launching point for a planned thirty-volume reissue of Lapse's exegetical writings that will also be made available to subscribers online.

To read Lapse four hundred years later is to enter a nearly forgotten world of biblical interpretation—where there are no clear lines between the historical, the literary, and the spiritual reading of the text; where philosophy, archeology, philology, and even the natural sciences are brought to bear in illuminating the divine meaning of the text.

Lapse's reading of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–13) includes: a discussion of numerology in Philo and Plato; a study of the possible Arabic background to certain expressions in the text; detailed considerations of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* and *Aeneid*, Catallus, Martial, and Pliny (all in relation to the symbolism of "nuptial lamps and torches"); not to mention citations of more than two dozen Church Fathers along with a quotation from Rabbi Achabia and the Mishnah. It is hard to say what is more striking—the sheer breadth and density of Lapse's interpretative matrix or his audacity in summoning all these resources to the interpretation of the sacred text.

Lapse himself takes a breathtakingly high view of Scripture's purposes:

The dignity, usefulness, and majesty of sacred Scripture are so great that it surpasses the books of all philosophers and theologians, among the Hebrew and the Greek and Latin authors, as much as divine wisdom surpasses all human wisdom. For sacred Scripture is the Word of God. It is the very utterance and speech of God, by means of which God enunciates his wisdom to us, and shows us the way to virtue, salvation, and eternal happiness. Wherefore St. Augustine (*Epistle* 3) ... asserts that sacred Scripture is an encyclopedia of all the sciences. ... Sacred Scripture is the art of arts, the science of sciences: it is the Pandora and the encyclopedia of wisdom.

Lapide prefaces his commentary with thirty-eight “canons of interpretation,” which reflect a wise and prayerful method. Canon 35, for instance, explains the “marvelous ... and wondrously consonant ... harmony of the New Testament with the Old” in the economy of salvation. This hermeneutical presupposition has consequences for Lapide’s method. “Hence, in order to explain a Scripture passage of the New Testament from its roots and foundations, examine and trace the figure, the prophecy or thought of the Old Testament to which it alludes. For the old Law was the prelude to the new, and the new is the completion of the old.”

It is clear that the Fathers hold of pride of place for Lapide in his interpretative work. He systematically catalogues all the Fathers’ comments on individual verses of Scripture. In places, his commentary recalls the beautiful and rich chain of patristic wisdom found in St. Thomas Aquinas’ famous *Catena Aurea*. Lapide’s four-volume work should be a welcome addition to the libraries of scholars and pastors alike.



Jonathan T. Pennington

Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew,
Supplements to Novum Testamentum 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2007)

Jonathan Pennington succeeds in what he sets out to do in this book—to unsettle a long-settled scholarly consensus. From the earliest days, New Testament interpreters have noticed that Matthew uses different terminology to describe the core of Jesus’ preaching. While the other evangelists recount Jesus preaching about the “Kingdom of God,” Matthew prefers the term “Kingdom of heaven.” In the modern period, scholars are all but agreed that the difference is due to Matthew’s sensitiv-

ity to his Jewish audience, which supposedly would have expected some reverential circumlocution to avoid pronouncing the divine name.

There have always been holes in this scholarly commonplace. What about the use of the word "God" throughout the rest of the gospels and New Testament, which presumably were also heard and read by Jews? Then there is the fact that Matthew's Jesus does use the expression "Kingdom of God" on four occasions; what explains that inconsistency? Pennington rightly sees that something deeper is going on in Matthew's Gospel.

He begins by noting that almost one-third of all the New Testament uses of the word *ouranos* ("heaven") are in Matthew; moreover, a larger "heaven and earth" motif is at work in Matthew, a motif not found in the other gospels. As Pennington notes:

The proclamation of God's coming is not just the Kingdom of God, it is the Kingdom of *heaven* (Matt. 3:2; 4:7; 13:11). The follower of Jesus does not just have God as Father, but as his or her Father in *heaven* (Matt. 5:16; 6:1; 10:32). The way to practice righteousness (Matt. 6:1) is described in terms of laying up *heavenly* treasures rather than fading *earthly* rewards (Matt. 6:19–20). The follower of Jesus should call no one *on earth* his father; but only the *heavenly* Father (Matt. 23:9). The Christian prayer is for the kingdom of the Father *in heaven* to manifest itself *on earth* (Matt. 6:9–10). And as the Church awaits the kingdom, they are given doctrinal and ecclesial authority *on earth* that receives sanction *from heaven* (Matt. 16:19; 18:18–19). Over and over again, Jesus' message in Matthew is put in terms of a dualistic heaven and earth contrast.

The pastoral and theological importance of this theme for Matthew emerges in Pennington's close reading and comparison with Old Testament and other texts. For one, this theme emphasizes that God's reign is universal—that is, that the Creator of heaven and earth is the ruler of all that is on earth and in heaven. Likewise, this theme legitimates the status of the Church as "the true people of God." For Matthew, Jesus' disciples are "a heavenly people in that they alone have a kingdom that is from heaven and a Father who is in heaven. The people of God are defined by Jesus as the ones who 'do the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7:21; 12:50). There is also a profound connection between the creation of heaven and earth and the creation of the true people of God."

Pennington makes a good contribution in establishing persuasively that Daniel 2–7 forms the backdrop to both the heaven and earth theme and the "Kingdom of heaven" motif in Matthew. He is not, of course, the first scholar to see the influence of Daniel on Matthew, or even the influence of Daniel on Matthew's

understanding of the kingdom; all told, there are more than thirty allusions to the prophetic text in his gospel. But in Pennington's patient analysis, the depth of this influence is made clear. Daniel and Matthew share a preoccupation with heaven (in Daniel 2–7, the word is used twenty-eight times), and both stress the opposition between God's reign in heaven and the reign of the kingdoms of the earth.

Indeed, in Daniel, God is called "the King of heaven" (Dan. 4:37). The prophet foretells the coming of a kingdom on earth to be established forever by "the God of heaven" (Dan. 2:44–45). There are anticipations of the Lord's Prayer, as Daniel looks forward to God's "will" being done in heaven and on earth (Dan. 4:35). Then there is the oft-quoted vision of the Son of Man who is "given dominion and glory and the kingdom" (Dan. 7:13–14).

To build his case, Pennington offers a useful survey of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the documents of the Qumran. While various of these texts interweave the same themes we find in Matthew—heaven, earth, and kingdom—"no text combines and appropriates these themes to the extent and degree that we find in Daniel 2–7," Pennington concludes.

For Pennington, the Danielic background offers us clues to the meaning of the Kingdom of heaven in Matthew. Like Daniel, Matthew sees the heavenly kingdom as a sign of God's reign over all the nations and as a "counterpoint of earthly kingdoms and earthly ways of operating a kingdom."

He also makes the interesting observation that the kingdom in Matthew is not understood in abstract terms of God's reign or rule. Rather, Matthew depicts the heavenly kingdom as having "spatial" dimensions as well. While acknowledging that "the ancient notion of heaven as a place is to modern, 'enlightened' scholars either a source of embarrassment or derision," he argues that Matthew clearly believes heaven to be "a dwelling place distinct from the earth"—the site of God's throne (Matt. 5:34) and his angels (18:10; 22:30; 24:36; 28:2).

Matthew uses the genitive "of heaven" in order to criticize existing empires and to deflate Jewish expectations of an earthly kingdom. On this point, Pennington quotes the late-nineteenth century scholar Hermann Cremer (*Biblico-theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*), who is among the few to see the influence of Daniel on Matthew's Kingdom theology:

It is a kingdom which has not its origin in the present earthly order of things, but which comes down to earth from heaven as a new order, molded not after the pattern of this earthly life; a kingdom wherein what hitherto was heavenly and beyond this world is manifested, and to which also the future brings.

Pennington agrees: "Matthew's choice to regularly depict the kingdom as *tōn ouranōn* [of heaven] is designed to emphasize that God's kingdom is not like

earthly kingdoms, stands over against them, and will eschatologically replace them (on earth)."

One might have hoped for Pennington to explain better the relationship between the heavenly kingdom and the earthly Church in Matthew. Nor does he sufficiently explain the "son of David" and Davidic Kingdom typology in Matthew as it might relate to the heavenly kingdom. But he does help us see how the conflict between the heavenly kingdom and the earthly rulers begins immediately in Matthew, in the conflict between Herod and Jesus, which established the latter as "the true King of the Jews (and the world)." Pennington also does a good job of relating the Kingdom of heaven with the Church's mission to the nations.

His research also sheds light on how Matthew intended his book to be "a new Genesis," portraying Jesus as "the culmination of God's redemptive purposes." There are quotations from Genesis (Matt. 19:4–5; 22:24), and allusions to the creation in Matthew's description of the Holy Spirit's work (Matt. 1:18–20; 3:16). Matthew's reference to the beloved son (Matt. 3:16) evokes the Abraham and Isaac story (Gen. 22), and there are other references to Abraham as well (Matt. 1:1–2; 3:9; 8:11; 22:32). Sodom (Matt. 10:15), "the days of Noah" (Matt. 24:37), and the Cain and Abel story are considered (compare Gen. 4:1–16; Matt. 5:21–5; 18:21–22; 23:34–36). The darkness of the world at Jesus' death compares to the darkness before the world was created (Matt. 27:54; Gen. 1:2). And as the gospel begins by calling Jesus the son of Abraham, it ends with an allusion to God's covenant promise to Abraham—that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed (Matt. 28:18–19; Gen. 22:18). Finally, there is Matthew's use of the rare term *palin-genesia* (19:28: "rebirth," "regeneration") another sign of his concern to depict a new creation.

Scholars have long noted this intention, apparent in the first two words of the gospel—*Biblos geneseōs*, which is the Greek rendering of "the Book of Genesis" in the Septuagint translation. And Pennington's study, by focusing on the centrality of the heaven and earth motif, illuminates Matthew's intention in all its splendor:

The prominence of heaven and earth in Genesis 1:1 (and beyond) connects with the heaven and earth theme throughout Matthew, with its climax in 28:19. ... It is also very significant that the final five words of Matthew ... likewise show his book-ending intentions. Reference to "the end of the age" seems clearly to form an *inclusio* with both Matthew 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, spanning from the creation to the end. Matthew 1:1 also highlights the role of Abraham, as does 28:19 with its reference to the Gospel going forth to "all nations." This clearly alludes to Genesis 11–12 and the introduction of Abraham as the one through whom God will bless "all the nations of the earth" (Gen. 12:2–3). This connection is very significant because in Genesis God's authority

as creator over heaven and earth (Gen. 1–2) is the basis for his redemptive purpose for all the nations, worked out through the person of Abraham (Gen. 12 and beyond). Matthew's structure shows sensitivity to this redemptive narrative, with its strong theme of heaven and earth throughout, culminating in Jesus' own authority over heaven and earth (God's prerogative in Gen. 1:1) *with the result that* his disciples may go and bring the blessings of the Gospel to all nations—the purpose and zenith of the process begun in Genesis 1–2. Therefore ... there is a good reason to believe that Matthew interwove his gospel with the heaven and earth theme and structured his narrative ... to connect his own gospel with the larger narrative of Genesis, thereby proclaiming that Jesus is the one in whom God's foundational purposes are consummated.



Matthew Levering

Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation
(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2008)

Modern biblical interpretation is in need of new philosophical and theological foundations. The biblical-exegetical guild in the academy has for too long been dominated by a belief that the Scripture scholar's basic task is limited to reconstructing the historical origins and intentions of individual texts. This job description reflects a set of deep philosophical, epistemological, and historical assumptions—assumptions that mark a radical departure from the original and formative traditions of biblical interpretation in the Church.

At the heart of the problem is a false understanding of history, writes Matthew Levering in his fine new book. Moderns look at history as a linear succession of moments continuing from the past through the present and into the future. In the modern view of history, human intention and action exist autonomously along this continuum, quite apart from any design or plans that God might have. By contrast, the “patristic-medieval” approach, which Levering seeks to retrieve in this book, sees history as a “participatory” project in which we partake of the life of God, through Christ and the sacraments of his Church, as part of the economy of God's on-going self-revelation.

Levering has written an engaging and fair-minded intellectual history which aims to return modern biblical interpretation to its philosophical and theological

source in the practice of the Church Fathers and medieval interpreters. The story Levering tells in this copiously annotated book is a familiar one, and he draws effectively from the best of recent scholarship on the rise of modernity, especially Anthony Levi's *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis*, and Louis Dupré's *Passage to Modernity* and *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*.

He locates the decisive moment in the "nominalist" drift in late medieval metaphysical philosophy. By the fourteenth century, as Levering explains, nominalist ways of the thinking had helped to undermine the patristic-medieval understanding of God's relationship with his human creatures and their history. St. Thomas Aquinas and earlier thinkers had proposed a radical interpenetration of the heavenly design and earthly realities, the divine will and the human will—with the human person created for the "final cause" of finding his or her happiness in God, and human history being a "participation" in the salvific plan of God and the very life and presence of God.

The thought of latter day "nominalists," exemplified for Levering by Blessed Duns Scotus, severed this participatory understanding of the divine-human relationship. In effect, a kind of parallel universe was created with a large gulf between heaven and earth—between the plans and purposes of God and the plans and purposes of men and women.

This, in turn, changed the way people read the Bible. As Levering writes, Scripture came to be seen "*primarily* as a linear-historical record of dates and places rather than as a providentially governed (revelatory) conversation with God in which the reader, within the sacramental and doctrinal matrix of the Church, is situated."

To illustrate this shift, Levering makes a creative narrative move. He traces the history of the interpretation of a single passage of Scripture, John 3:27–36, through ten Catholic interpreters, ranging from the "radically participatory" exegesis of Aquinas in the Middle Ages to the exclusively literary and historical reading of Raymond Brown, the dominant figure in late twentieth-century Catholic exegesis.

Levering dramatizes a remarkable change in perspective. Aquinas reads the text in a way that reflects his belief that Scripture describes a divine reality that believers experience and participate in through their baptism. Further, his exegesis aims at inviting readers into an ever greater sharing in this trinitarian life of God through what Levering describes as the "transformative movement of deification and eschatology." By Raymond Brown's time, the job of biblical interpretation has been reduced from this kind of sublime cooperation in God's revelation, to a kind of archeological recovery of the text's "historical" meaning, understood as what the text meant for its original first-century A.D. audience.

Levering wants to renew Catholic exegesis through reclaiming the approach found in Aquinas and before him in St. Augustine, especially in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (On Christian Doctrine).

This approach, as Levering synthesizes and explains it, has three prongs. The first is the return to an understanding of history as the locus of our participation in the divine life and in the economy established by God's creative and redemptive work. Second, he wants us to return to an understanding of the interpreter's task as a sharing in the divine pedagogy of "God the Teacher," and a bringing of others into "fellowship" with God through the encounter with Jesus Christ in Scripture (see 1 John 1:2–3). Finally, Levering wants to reaffirm biblical exegesis as an "ecclesial" task in which the exegete participates in the divine mission of passing on the *sacra doctrina* entrusted to the Church.

Levering has thus made an important contribution to our understanding of the task of the biblical exegete. And he demonstrates how this approach does not detract from historical and literary study, rather it deepens it.

[W]hat can be learned about the ancient Near East, the transmission of the texts, and so forth belong to the historicity of salvation. The difference is simply that such historical work cannot, in the case of biblical interpretation, exhaust the meaning of the "historical," because we know in faith other realities operating in history—among them, for example, the triune God's creation of the world, the providential shaping of God's people Israel, the working of the Holy Spirit, the divinity of Jesus, the Church as Christ's Mystical Body, the spiritual mediation accomplished by the sacraments, and the eschatological promise of divinization. Without negating historical research into the biblical texts, it is these realities that guide interpretation of the historical meaning of Scripture, since these realities enable us to understand the historical aspects in their fullness and with proper perspective.

Levering's argument would be stronger had he offered an account of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. There is no question that he presumes the central importance of inspiration and inerrancy for a true understanding of Scripture, but his theology of interpretation remains incomplete without an explanation of how, in the economy of salvation, the human authors participate with God in the "authorship" of the sacred texts, and what that cooperation means for our reading of Scripture.

One thinks, too, that Levering's account of exegesis and ecclesial authority might benefit from a deeper engagement with the early Church's establishments of apostolic succession, the canon, and the rule of faith (*regula fidei*). And one senses, as well, that his treatment of the task of exegesis is unfinished without any account

of the liturgy and the relationship between the interpretation of Scripture and the sacraments by which the “hearers” of Scripture are brought into fellowship with God. Finally, to fully ground a new theology of biblical interpretation, we need a greater reflection on the relationship of faith and reason and the problems that stem from what Pope Benedict XVI has called “the self-limitation of reason” since the Enlightenment and Kant.

Levering is to be credited, however, with advancing a Catholic approach to Scripture within the broadly ecumenical context of the ongoing public theology debate. That said, there is much to recommend and to think about in this book, which offers an inspiring vision that will hopefully find wide readership in the academy.

[T]he missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit enable the Church to participate in and mediate God’s salvific *sacra doctrina* for the whole world. ... [T]he Church, as Christ’s Bride, receives interpretive authority by sharing in Christ’s Spirit. Both the Church and the divinely inspired Scripture in the Church are thus “sacramental” realities whose purpose is the salvation of the human race. In the Holy Spirit, Christ the teacher gives his authority to the mediations—the interrelated offices, charisms, and vocations that form his visible Body—in and through which he is efficaciously embodied and proclaimed in the world. Christ has won historically the victory over the principalities and powers; through his *doctrina*, the wisdom that is kenotic love, he frees human beings from the principalities and powers. Exegetes are called to this freedom. It is precisely the christological and pneumatological authority of the Church that allows individual exegetes the freedom of self-dispossession, the confidence that the grace of the Holy Spirit is in charge of the exegesis of the Son.



G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds.

Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007)

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson have assembled a superb team of Protestant exegetes to produce this unique commentary that sets itself to the task of analyzing every Old Testament citation and probable allusion in each book of the New Testament. In addition, contributors have provided extensive bibliographies, making this an excellent reference guide to the best of current New Testament scholarship.

While the format for individual commentaries varies, each contributor was asked to systematically address the following questions: What is the context in which the New Testament writer makes use of the Old Testament reference? What is the original Old Testament context for these quotes and allusions? How were these same Old Testament passages treated in the literature of Second Temple Judaism? What are the textual sources for the citations (for example, is the New Testament writer quoting the Masoretic or Septuagint text)? How and why is the New Testament writer using the Old Testament text? And finally, what theological purpose is being advanced by the quotation or allusion?

The results of this format and method are often intensely close readings that yield new insights on the texts. Beale's commentary on Colossians, for instance, is one of the first full studies of the epistle's use of the Old Testament. He includes an unexpected excursus on Temple Wisdom traditions as a possible background to Colossians 1:19. He shows how "early Judaism viewed 'Wisdom' as having its 'headquarters' in the Temple." Beale continues:

This background about the association of "Wisdom" and the "Temple" points further to a Temple reference in Colossians 1:19 and may even make more sense of why Colossians 1:9 alludes to Exodus 31:3; 35:31, where God filled people with the Spirit in order to have "Wisdom" to be able to build the Tabernacle. Paul may already subtly be anticipating the Old Testament Temple allusion of Colossians 1:19. ... Thus, one reason why Christ should "come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:18b) is that he is God and is the inauguration of the eschatological Temple, in which God's fullness and Wisdom have begun to dwell.

In their excellent contribution on Revelation, Beale and Sean McDonough include a long and rich consideration of the world-Temple symbolism in Revelation 22.

The rationale for the worldwide encompassing nature of the paradisaical Temple lies in the ancient notion that the Old Testament Temple was a microcosmic model of the entire heaven and earth. One of the most explicit texts affirming this is Psalm 78:69: "And he built the sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he founded forever." ... Josephus and Philo discuss various ways in which the Tabernacle or Temple or parts of it symbolically reflect the cosmos. Josephus refers to priests as leading the "cosmic worship" [*kosmikē thrēskeia*]. ... Likewise, both writers understand the garments of the High Priest to symbolize the cosmos. Philo, even says explicitly that the High Priest "represents the world" and is a "microcosm" (or "small world" [*brachys kosmos*]). ... Since the Old Testament Temple was the localized dwelling of God's presence on earth, the Temple's correspondence with the cosmos pointed to an eschatological goal of God's presence tabernacling throughout the earth, an eschatological goal that Revelation 21:1–22:5 appears to be developing (compare Rev. 21:3). This imagery ultimately appears to be traceable back to the garden of Eden itself (note the proliferation of Eden imagery in chaps. 21–22), if one accepts the likely argument that the garden was understood as a kind of proto-Temple that was to be expanded to cover the whole earth.

This landmark commentary promises to bring to pastors, scholars, and ordinary believers the fruits of more than a generation of intertextual scholarship. The seeds sown by C. H. Dodd and a few other scholars a generation ago have borne their fruit. What this volume shows is how the New Testament writers were not only careful readers of the Old Testament but also profound theologians themselves.