

OF PROFESSORS AND MADMEN: CURRENTS IN CONTEMPORARY NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

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Scholars are a strange breed. Many a scholar, it seems, is good for one thing, and one thing only: to write books, in many cases books that seem to make little difference in the way people live. A case in point is a fellow Ph.D. student of mine at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who wrote his dissertation on improper prepositions in the Greek. What could possibly be gained by the study of Greek prepositions, and *improper* ones at that? I must confess that when my friend told me that this was his dissertation topic, I had never even heard of such a thing, and *I* was a doctoral student in New Testament. For reasons such as these William Faulkner, the famous novelist, was not too far off the mark when he once said that a writer's obituary should read as follows: "He wrote the books, then he died."¹ Yet while scholars are much maligned (including in this very chapel, where most references to commentary writers in recent memory according to one unscientific survey have been negative), most of us would agree, and many a wife of a scholar would attest, that while it's often hard to live with them, it would also be difficult to live without them. What would pastors do without commentaries, or Bible students without Bible study helps, Study Bibles, and reference works? We may not always realize it, but we are indeed indebted to the work of text critics, Bible translators, Hebrew and Greek scholars, and many other laborers in the Lord's scholarly vineyard. For this reason I am not ashamed to identify myself before you today, aware of the many negative stereotypes attached to this label, as a scholar, in my particular case a scholar specializing in the study of the New Testament.

My topic today is “Currents in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship.”² For us scholars it is sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees, immersed as we are in teaching (and in some cases, administrative) responsibilities, participation in scholarly societies, and various scholarly projects of our own. But sabbaticals come around only once every seven years, and I submit we shouldn’t wait that long to see our work in proper perspective. For many of you who are called to the pastorate or to other kinds of Christian ministry and who do not feel any special urge to join the ranks of scholars (to which I would add, “By all means, don’t, unless God calls you”), it may just be interesting to learn a bit more about what goes into the books you are using in your New Testament classes. So what I propose to do today in my faculty lecture is to discuss currents in contemporary New Testament scholarship, that is, give you a select retrospect and prospect of the discipline, a report from the front lines or trenches, as it were, of New Testament scholarship. Hopefully you will find this report informative or at least entertaining, and perhaps the next few minutes will also help you get better oriented as to where we currently are, and in my opinion should be headed, in New Testament studies in the next few years.

New Trends in New Testament Scholarship

The Theological Interpretation of Scripture

At least judging by the buzz generated by the new *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* edited by Kevin Vanhoozer at the recent meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Society of Biblical Literature, the most important current trend in New Testament scholarship is the movement advocating the theological interpretation of Scripture.³ Apart from the new dictionary, there is also a projected new journal, the *Journal of Theological*

Interpretation (editor: Joel Green); a new commentary series published by Brazos Press written by theologians (inaugural volume: Jaroslav Pelikan on the book of Acts); the Two Horizons series published by Eerdmans; and so on.⁴

The novice may ask: What is new about interpreting the Bible theologically? Have not interpreters of Scripture always sought to read the Bible with a view toward what it teaches about God, Christ, etc.? They certainly have. But this is not the point of the new movement advocating the theological interpretation of Scripture. Rather, what Vanhoozer and others are seeking to overcome is the compartmentalization of those studying Scripture into carefully delineated departments or areas of specialty: biblical studies, theological studies, church history, and applied theology. The New Testament, contends Vanhoozer, is not exclusively or even primarily the domain of the New Testament scholar. Rather, theologians such as Vanhoozer have every right, even obligation, to interpret Scripture from their own theological vantage point in order to extract from Scripture its theological message, transcending internecine quibbles about matters such as textual criticism, introductory matters, historical background, or fine points of exegesis.

In his preface to the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation*, Vanhoozer sketches his agenda by stating at the outset what theological interpretation of the Bible is *not*: it is not an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text; it is not an imposition of a general hermeneutic or theory of interpretation onto Scripture; it is not a form of mere historical, literary, or sociological criticism preoccupied with the world “behind,” “of,” or “in front of” the biblical text.⁵ Rather, faced with the “ugly ditch” in modern biblical interpretation between exegesis and theology and the “muddy ditch” in postmodern biblical interpretation between exegesis and ideology, theological interpretation of the Bible should be

conceived of as the joint responsibility of *all* the theological disciplines and of the *whole* people of God.⁶ The theological interpretation of the Bible is characterized by a governing interest in God and the word and works of God, by an intention to engage in what we might call “theological criticism,” and driven by a broad ecclesial concern.

By calling for a movement toward the theological interpretation of the Bible, Vanhoozer seeks to overcome Lessing’s famous “ugly ditch,” the gap between reason and faith, between verifiable history on the one hand and personally held beliefs on the other. According to Vanhoozer, reconstructing New Testament history in an effort to understand the biblical text in its original context can only carry us so far. Rather than studying religion as a function of anthropology, we must engage in the study of theology, the study of God and his mighty acts. Not only is the Bible a source for reconstructing human history and religion, it testifies to God’s presence, power, and provision of salvation in human history.

Not only is there the modern “ugly ditch” between reason and faith to be overcome, there is also the postmodern “muddy ditch”: the quagmire of history, language, tradition, and culture, which appears to make it impossible for the biblical interpreter to rise above his own subjective horizon and that of his interpretive community. As discussed at some length in the recent work *Whatever Happened to Truth?* to which Vanhoozer is one of the contributors, in postmodern thought truth is viewed as a social construct rather than as correspondence to reality or as “true truth,” as Francis Schaeffer called it decades ago.⁷ How can we escape the “ugly” and “muddy” ditches in our study of Scripture? According to Vanhoozer, this is possible only by breaking down the interdepartmental “iron curtains” that separate New Testament scholars from systematic theologians, church historians, and specialists in preaching, missions or evangelism.

The effect of such integration and coordination of efforts will be akin to nothing less than the fall of the Berlin wall, though, one might add, as there it may take a while before full integration can be successfully achieved.

I don't have time here to provide a thorough, or even brief, assessment of this new movement advocating the theological interpretation of Scripture (though I will register one concern below). I am only able to point to the important implications of such a movement for the way in which we structure our own areas of research (we don't have departments at Southeastern) and, even more importantly, the way in which we conceive of and devise our curriculum. There have been many very hopeful signs on our campus with regard to increased collaboration between the Old and New Testament faculty on the one hand and those working in theology, church history, ethics, philosophy, preaching, missions, and evangelism on the other. Many of those teaching Systematics or Christian Ethics have always sought to be firmly grounded in scriptural exegesis and have sought to interpret the Bible theologically and in collaboration with other disciplines. Our recent curriculum review has led to a new projected course of study that may still not be what some of us would consider the ideal but one that is considerably closer to the kinds of priorities and balance that are in keeping with the movement toward theological integration described above. This movement also validates the purpose and goals of the Ph.D. Integrative Seminar (and soon Ed.D. Integrative Seminar), which has been a core component of the doctoral program here at Southeastern for some time.

There are also implications for collaboration on book projects and team-teaching, among other things. Before moving on to another topic, let me just register one caution or disclaimer here. What Vanhoozer and the proponents of the theological interpretation of Scripture are *not*

saying, I believe, is that theologians should interpret Scripture without proper biblical language skills or that there is no value in specializing in New or Old Testament research. This would be taking his concern too far. His point is rather that biblical scholars cannot legitimately claim biblical interpretation to be their exclusive turf. If so, however, I believe the converse would seem to hold true as well: neither should theology be considered the exclusive domain of theologians.

Biblical Theology

Another major trend in contemporary New Testament scholarship is that toward biblical theology. Don Carson has been editing a series called *New Studies in Biblical Theology* for quite some time, featuring titles on biblical topics such as worship, wealth and poverty, justification, or missions, to name but a few. Zondervan has recently commissioned a five-volume series entitled *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, with noted contributors such as Douglas J. Moo (Pauline theology) and Darrell Bock (Lukan theology).⁸ The major papers of a recent Wheaton conference on the topic have been published under the title *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*.⁹ Major Biblical Theologies have been published by scholars such as Charles Scobie, Peter Stuhlmacher, and James Barr.¹⁰ Major New Testament theologies by I. Howard Marshall and Frank Thielman and major Pauline theologies by James Dunn and Thomas Schreiner also fall into this rubric. Doubtless this proliferation of new publications in the field of biblical theology is the sign of a reinvigoration of the discipline.

What is biblical theology? In short, biblical theology is the theology of the Bible. In Schlatter's classic formulation, in our pursuit of biblical and New Testament theology, "We turn

away decisively from ourselves and our time to what was found in the men through whom the church came into being [i.e. the New Testament writers]. Our main interest should be the thought as it was conceived *by them* and the truth that was valid *for them*. We want to see and obtain a thorough grasp of what happened historically and existed in another time. This is the internal disposition upon which the success of the work depends, the commitment which must consistently be renewed as the work proceeds.”¹¹ Before addressing our own questions, we must first listen to the New Testament writers and documents themselves in order to understand the message of the New Testament on its own terms, in its own language, and in its original cultural, historical, and ecclesial contexts.

Interestingly, Kevin Vanhoozer, in the aforementioned dictionary, addresses the relationship between the theological interpretation of the Bible he advocates and biblical theology. He contends that biblical theology, as conceived by some, is of more antiquarian than ecclesial interest, focusing on what the text meant “back then” rather than what it means today.¹² (He acknowledges that others view biblical theology as virtually identical with the theological interpretation of Scripture.) While at first blush Vanhoozer’s criticism seems legitimate, however, it should be noted that at this point Vanhoozer differs from the way in which the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology or ethics has been traditionally conceived by evangelical interpreters. Grant Osborne, for example, says he agrees with R. T. France’s call for “the priority in biblical interpretation of what has come to be called ‘the first horizon,’ i.e. of understanding biblical language within its own context before we start exploring its relevance to our own concerns, and of keeping the essential biblical context in view as a control on the way we apply biblical language to current issues.”¹³

Schlatter, likewise, argues that

[a]part from the historical task there remains, constantly and necessarily, a second one, the doctrinal task, through which we align ourselves with the teachings of the New Testament and clarify whether or not and how and why we accept those teachings into our own spiritual lives, so that they are not only truth for the New Testament community, but also for us personally. The distinction between these two activities thus turns out to be beneficial for both. Distortions in the perception of the subject also harm its appropriation, just as conversely improper procedures in the appropriation of the subject muddy its perception.¹⁴

I think Osborne, France, and Schlatter are right in maintaining a distinction between biblical theology and what Schlatter calls “the doctrinal task.” Vanhoozer’s model here seems to collapse what France, Thiselton, and others call “the two horizons” of interpretation, and it is unclear, at least to me, how this does not potentially “muddy the perception” of the scriptural message, as Schlatter contends. Could it be that Vanhoozer here replaces the “muddy ditch” of postmodernism with a “muddy perception” of his own?

In any case, I believe that biblical theology is a force to be reckoned with in New Testament scholarship in the years to come. While Brevard Childs, in his famous 1970 volume, diagnosed that biblical theology as a movement was “in crisis,” 35 years later we find that the patient has miraculously recovered, and the “new and improved” version of it promises to give a fresh impetus to the exploration of the New Testament message.¹⁵ Works such as the above-mentioned Charles Scobie’s *The Ways of Our God*, a massive 1,000-page biblical theology, or the well-received New Testament theologies by Howard Marshall or Frank Thielman utilize a

biblical theology approach.¹⁶ Wheaton's new Ph.D. in Biblical Theology and Southeastern's addition of a Ph.D. concentration in Biblical Theology (which has been very popular, I might add) are further indications that this represents a marked and notable trend in biblical scholarship.

Inquiries into the Nature of Early Christianity

Another major issue in current New Testament scholarship is that of inquiry into the nature of early Christianity. For the vast part of its 2,000-year history the church has assumed that the early Christians were united in their essential convictions—the conventional term used for this consensus is “orthodoxy”—and that it was only later that challenges to this consensus arose in the form of heresies such as Gnosticism and a host of other deviations from the apostolic teaching and the church's “rule of faith.” In an immensely influential work written in 1934 (not translated into the English until 1971) entitled *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity*, the German scholar Walter Bauer, known better for his lexical work that has come down to us in his *Greek-English Lexicon*, argued that the direction was actually the other way around: rather than moving from orthodoxy to heresy, early Christianity in fact progressed from an initial diversity of viewpoints to a mandated, even coerced, ecclesiastical uniformity of belief—“orthodoxy”—that was a function, not so much of what the church judged to be true, but of what it deemed to be ecclesiastically and politically desirable in order to subdue Christendom under its institutional hierarchy.¹⁷

Bauer's thesis, while certainly not commanding universal approval, was essentially embraced and propagated by influential scholars such as James Robinson and Helmut Koester in

their *Trajectories through Early Christianity* and James D. G. Dunn in his 1977 work *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (revised in 1990).¹⁸ More recently, it has been popularized by writers such as Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman in their numerous publications, Pagels in the acclaimed *The Gnostic Gospels* and *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, Ehrman most recently in his works *The Lost Christianities* and *Lost Scriptures*.¹⁹ What these works have in common is the notion that Scripture in its current form does not contain the *only* forms of legitimate Christian expression and belief but only *one* such form and that the canon should be expanded or reworked altogether to include other legitimate expressions of Christianity, including Gnostic Gospels such as the Gospel of Thomas (see also the notorious Jesus Seminar and its book *The Five Gospels* and the bestselling book *The Da Vinci Code*).²⁰

Again, time does not permit a full critique of Bauer's and Ehrman's thesis. It does not take long, however, to realize that their model is fundamentally at odds with the New Testament portrayal of the state of early Christianity. Luke states in Acts 2:42 that the early Christians devoted themselves to "the apostles' teaching," which implies the essential doctrinal unity of the early church. Paul speaks in 1 Cor 15:3–4 of the gospel which he himself received and which he passed on to the Corinthians, namely "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Later, he charges Timothy to "guard the good deposit" that he had entrusted to him, speaking of "the pattern of sound teaching" Timothy had received (2 Tim 1:13–14). In Romans, too, Paul speaks of the gospel very much in terms that suggest that the core Christian message was at that time widely regarded as fixed and commonly agreed upon (e.g., Rom 1:1–4, 15–17).

This does not mean that there were not exceptions to this rule; certainly there were those who differed and held to a “different gospel” (Gal 1:6). Yet as Paul writes in his very first canonical letter, the epistle to the Galatians, holding to a “different gospel” as the Judaizers did was in fact teaching that which was no gospel at all (Gal 1:7). Paul’s gospel, therefore, served as the standard by which all Christian or allegedly Christian preaching was judged. The apostles’ teaching, and later Paul’s preaching, constituted what can rightly be called “orthodoxy,” and formed the basis on which Paul could call on Timothy, for example, to “stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain persons *not to teach false doctrines* any longer” (1 Tim 1:3), pronouncing an anathema on “whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me” (1 Tim 1:11).

Passages such as these make very clear that Bauer’s thesis, largely argued on historical grounds (dubious ones, as it turns out), is not borne out by the message of the New Testament. At the recent annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Paul Trebilco engaged in a point-by-point refutation of the historical evidence set forth by Bauer by way of a closely argued historical study of first- and early second-century Ephesus.²¹ According to Trebilco,

Bauer’s thesis does not stand up to scrutiny with regard to the situation in Western Asia Minor. . . . what Bauer calls “heresy” is neither the earliest form of Christian faith, nor is it in the majority. . . . By contrast, in the period from around 65 to 135, we can argue that there were strong and influential voices which stood for what later became “orthodoxy,” notably voices in both the Pauline and Johannine traditions. Further, . . . , we find a strong concern to discern what the authors regarded as acceptable belief and practice—which is in continuity with what later became orthodoxy.²²

In another paper forthcoming as a chapter in the book *Missing Gospels*, Darrell Bock likewise provided a devastating critique of Bauer's thesis.²³ Noting that many details in Bauer's work have been shown to be wrong, Bock expresses his dismay that many scholars continue to hold to Bauer's thesis at large. Calling this the "schizophrenic handling" of the evidence, Bock asks, "Can a theory be wrong in the details, but right on the overall theory?" Charles Hill, too, in a masterful monograph entitled *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, decisively refutes the notion that a diversity of viewpoints reigned in the early church that only later was replaced with what came to be known as orthodoxy.²⁴ Rather, Hill shows that John's Gospel, for its part, was considered to be apostolic and authoritative from the earliest patristic period even before it was used and distorted by the Gnostics in an effort to propagate their own message.²⁵

Nevertheless, at least on a popular level, protestations by Bock and others notwithstanding, the view continues to persist that Bauer, Ehrman, and others may be wrong in some of the details but are right in their overall theory. Their dictum, "Let the other side be heard," seems so fair, and their maxim, "History is written by the winners," resonates with those who are critical of those in high places and their abuse of power.²⁶ What is more, the notion that what we today consider to be orthodoxy won out merely because of "favorable circumstances" rather than because of the intrinsic, divinely-revealed truth of its content is in perfect harmony with the prevailing postmodern climate which is cynical toward all notions of absolute truth. As mentioned, postmodern thought considers truth as nothing but a social construct serving political ends. In this kind of cultural and intellectual climate, no conspiracy theory is too implausible to be floated as, if not likely, so at least scintillating and worth contemplating. In fact, as David Liefeld demonstrates in a recent article subtitled, "Postmodern Conspiracy Culture and Feminist

Myths of Christian Origins,” conspiracy theories are deeply entrenched not only in American culture at large but also in much of feminist scholarship, which employs a “hermeneutic of suspicion” and feeds on the notion that female authority and authentic self-expression were suppressed by the church of the second and subsequent centuries.²⁷

Other Trends in Current New Testament Scholarship

We have time only to mention more briefly a few other noteworthy trends in current New Testament scholarship: the so-called “new perspectives” on Jesus and Paul; new works on mission; and the perennially hot topic of men’s and women’s roles in the home and in the church, which has in recent years spilled over into the gender-inclusive language debate with regard to recent Bible translations (of which there are many).

First, let me say a word on the “new perspective on Jesus” (which is less well-known than that on Paul). In James Dunn’s new book, *A New Perspective on Jesus*, which is a popularized version of his *Jesus Remembered*, Dunn proposes to have found the solution that has long eluded Gospels scholars.²⁸ Rather than locate the explanation for the interrelationship between the Gospels exclusively on a literary level, Dunn contends that the four canonical Gospels present different ways in which Jesus was *remembered*, reflecting a good deal of *oral tradition*. I think many of us would resonate with this point. Clearly, literary comparisons by way of source criticism, redaction criticism, and other criticisms have their limitations, and non-literary factors such as eyewitness recollection or oral tradition have not been adequately integrated into a full-orbed hypothesis on the relationship between the Gospels, particularly the so-called Synoptic Gospels.

At the same time, it is important to remember, however, that Dunn is not always as conservative as it may appear, not dissimilar to the British scholar C. H. Dodd in a previous generation.²⁹ For example, in my work on John's Gospel I became aware that Dunn believes John invented, or, in his own words, "imagined" large swaths of Jesus' interrogation before Pilate.³⁰ If so, perhaps *Jesus Imagined* would be a better title of his book than *Jesus Remembered*! Dunn also calls the Gospels' portrait of Pilate "biased."³¹ Another British scholar, Andrew Lincoln, similarly asserts that it is "not plausible to defend any consistent or detailed one-to-one correspondence between John's narrative and what is likely to have happened in the ministry of Jesus," but that this is no problem because "truth . . . is not to be confused with the factual accuracy of each detail of the Gospel but is the message of its overall narrative."³² Tom Wright, yet another well-known British scholar, likewise finds the authority of Scripture, not in the very words of Scripture, but in the general storyline of the Bible.³³ Clearly, this celebrated triumvirate of writers does not believe in inerrancy and certainly could not sign the ETS doctrinal statement (though the recent annual meeting included a panel discussion of Dunn's *Jesus Remembered*, with Dunn participating).

In that session, incidentally, Scot McKnight responded to Dunn in a paper entitled "Telling the Truth of History." He criticized Dunn for, in effect, saying that "the Jesus of the Gospels is at one and the same time the Jesus who created faith and the Jesus who was shaped by that faith." To be sure, the Jesus of the Gospels is "an interpreted Jesus," but it is Jesus' person and teaching that created faith in his followers, and their writings attest to the actual Jesus they encountered and their faith in him. McKnight also points out that Dunn's theory of "Jesus remembered" contains elements of postmodernist historiography, according to which "[h]istory

amounts to little more than autobiography and politics” and “discrete facts (or data) do not carry meaning but that meaning is shaped by the narrative into which they are placed.”³⁴

At that same session, in a perceptive critique, Don Hagner of Fuller Seminary chided Dunn for using folklore and romance as his primary model for oral tradition rather than first-century teacher-disciple relationships. He also faulted Dunn for underestimating the role memorization may have played in that process and for not adequately recognizing the uniqueness of Jesus as the fountainhead of Christian tradition (cf. Matt 23:8, 10). Hagner pointed out that the Twelve in the Gospels and the apostles in the book of Acts serve as witnesses and that their function as eyewitnesses and tradents of early tradition about Jesus is accentuated further by the Church Father Papias’s elevation of oral tradition above written records. Rather than leaving the transmission of Jesus’ words and actions to largely informal and uncontrolled processes, as Dunn contends, Hagner argued that it is much more likely that the process was more formal and controlled than Dunn allows.

In response, Dunn pointed out that he is protesting against the dichotomy in the various quests of Jesus between the “Christ of faith” and the historical Jesus, in which the faith of the early Christians is often considered as a barrier in recovering the historical Jesus (see already Martin Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann, among many others). Dunn claims that the so-called historical Jesus is indeed recoverable—but it is not the Jesus reconstructed by historical criticism, but the real Jesus we find in the Gospels. He observes that historical criticism operates with an archeological-type model: various layers of tradition are removed, and what is left is the archeological artifact—the so-called “historical Jesus.”

By contrast, Dunn contends that a more fruitful approach is to view the Gospels as a depository reflecting the impression and impact Jesus made on his followers. Early form criticism sought to trace the Gospel material back to an original single version (an *Ur-Gospel*) which alone was deemed authentic. But can there really be a single “version” of what Jesus did? Even Jesus’ teaching was heard differently. Are variations in the Gospel accounts then to be equated with “errors”? Dunn thinks not. Rather, the Gospels reflect different, but equally legitimate, ways in which Jesus was remembered and in which the story of Jesus was retold.

As mentioned, traditional historical-critical scholarship, such as Rudolf Bultmann, dichotomized sharply between the “historical Jesus,” unrecoverable to the critical historian’s eye owing to the “faith bias” of the evangelists, and the “Christ of faith,” as depicted by those possessing “Easter faith” (that is, faith subsequent to the resurrection). But what about the impact Jesus made on his followers *prior to* the crucifixion? Why not recover the Jesus who impacted his disciples the way he quite obviously did? If so, there is no longer any sharp dichotomy between two different “Jesuses” but essential continuity between Jesus’ words and actions prior to the crucifixion and the disciples’ faith remembrances of Jesus subsequent to the resurrection. This, among other places, is clearly seen in John’s repeated reference to the disciples’ original lack of understanding which was transformed subsequent to the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit (e.g. John 2:22; 12:16).

Hence, I believe, while Dunn may not be sufficiently conservative in his view of Scripture and, as Hagner contends, use the wrong model for the transmission of oral tradition, he has made an important contribution to the study of Jesus and the Gospels. I believe he is correct to point to the limitations of redaction criticism and other historical-critical methods and to note

that they cannot explain all differences in terms of literary dependence. To use Dunn's terminology, Gospels scholars should alter their "default setting" and think not only in literary terms but also in terms of oral tradition. After all, it was in operation decades before the (oral) apostolic teaching was given literary shape in form of our canonical Gospels. As Dunn rightly notes, just because we are able to explain differences in literary terms does not necessarily mean that this is the correct explanation.

Since I am not primarily a Pauline scholar, and since time is running out, I will not now comment on the issues raised by the "new perspective on Paul." There is in any case no lack of recent evangelical critiques of it, most notably the 2 volumes on *Paul and Variegated Nomism* edited by Don Carson and others.³⁵ I also can but mention several important new books on mission, most notably Eckhard Schnabel's massive and magisterial 2-volume work *Early Christian Mission*, which is not only an amazing work of erudition (almost 2,000 pages and a 170-page Bibliography!) but also a gift to the church and the missionary movement.³⁶

In light of the surprise success of Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*, which climbed atop both the amazon and the *New York Times* bestseller list, perhaps I should also add *textual criticism* to my list of topics. In this book, Ehrman mixes a basic introduction to textual criticism for a lay audience with a concerted attack on the trustworthiness of Scripture, and does so in a decidedly disingenuous way. Here is what he does. He cites exceptional cases such as the pericope of the adulterous woman in John 8; the longer ending of Mark; and the so-called "Johannine Comma" in 1 John 5, which are held to be original by few, and then claims that these exceptional cases are in fact typical and representative of the New Testament at large. I say he is disingenuous, because he knows better than that, but he uses scholarship to discredit the Bible.

Pursuing this destructive agenda is unworthy of any text critic, who is supposed to assess the external and internal evidence for given variant readings in as impartial and objective a manner as possible. Just yesterday I edited a compelling response to Bart Ehrman's book written by Dan Wallace of Dallas Seminary, which is already posted on www.bible.org and will be published in the June issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. If I had the time, I would summarize Dan's argument here, which is all that needs to be said on the issue, but I do not. Read his review.³⁷

I close with a few comments on developments in the gender roles arena, an issue close to my heart. Here are some interesting recent developments. First, Timothy George, in an article printed in a recent issue of *Christianity Today*, has called on complementarians and egalitarians to get along and to realize that this is not a first-order issue.³⁸ Rather, we should agree to disagree and to join forces in missions and evangelism. The argument is similar to the thinking undergirding *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, a document spelling out the common ground between these two movements, in which Timothy George also was a participant. George's vision here differs sharply from that of Albert Mohler or Wayne Grudem, who consider the issue of gender roles, not a salvation truth, but a foundational issue that has tremendous ramifications for the doctrine and practice of the Church. It will be interesting to see further dialogue and resolution, or further bifurcation, on this issue.

Finally, Russell Moore, in a provocative paper entitled "After Patriarchy, What?" called on complementarians to put teeth back into their view of gender roles, urging a return to patriarchy.³⁹ Those who hold to the husband's authority in the family and in the church should not be ashamed or embarrassed to acknowledge this, and the word "complementarian," which, as

Moore notes, was in any case an artificial coinage by a few people gathered in a hotel room several years ago, inadequately references the notion of authority. Moore's proposal deserves to be taken seriously. It seems to me, however, that something could be gained by consulting the eminent Old Testament scholar Daniel Block's essay on marriage and family in ancient Israel in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*.⁴⁰

In this comprehensive, 100-page essay, Block questions whether "patriarchy" is the best way to describe the father's role in the Old Testament, since this terminology in his view focuses too much on the *rule* of the father, while in fact the emphasis lay more on the father's provision for and protection of those under his care. For this reason Block suggests that "patricentrism," rather than "patriarchy," more accurately describes the role of the father in ancient Israel. This reflects the reality that, as Block notes, "Like the spokes of a wheel, family life radiated outward from" the father.⁴¹ While Moore is probably right that "complementarian" is not the best term to use as a label for those favoring the husband's and father's authoritative role in marriage and family, in light of Daniel Block's work perhaps "patricentric" may be a better word than "patriarchal," especially since it avoids the many negative connotations the term "patriarchy" carries owing to feminist propaganda on the subject.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, there is no time now to discuss the latest twists and turns in the gender-neutral language debate with regard to Bible translation, which includes recent ETS presentations by Douglas Moo and Mark Strauss on one side and an entire issue of the *Journal of Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* responding to the TNIV on the other.⁴² Clearly, revising the gender language in Bible translations is a very risky business. While efforts to modernize Bible translations are commendable in principle, this challenge must be delicately

pursued, with proper attention being paid to the issues of inerrancy and biblical fidelity. As you know, President Akin and others in our Convention have serious concerns about the use of the TNIV and similar translations in preaching and teaching. This, too, will continue to be an important topic of discussion among evangelicals in the months and years to come.⁴³

I conclude.

Conclusion

In his work *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Simon Winchester tells the story of a Dr. W. C. Minor, who provided thousands of learned entries to the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* when it was compiled in the late 19th century.⁴⁴ As it turned out, however, Dr. Minor, an expatriate American and Civil War veteran, was in fact a certified lunatic who wrote his entries in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum near London, England. Earlier, Minor had been institutionalized for the murder of a British brewery worker whom the deluded Minor believed to be an assassin commissioned by one of his imagined “enemies.”

In a study of contrasts, Winchester also sketches a fascinating portrait of Professor James Murray, who, like Abraham of old, spent over 40 years of his life working on a project whose completion he would not see during his lifetime. While Murray, the professor, and Minor, the madman, differed vastly in terms of scholarly status and life story, they both shared a love of scholarship and of the English language. Hence the professor and the madman became partners in the common quest of compiling the famous *Oxford English Dictionary*.

As we reflect on the history of New Testament scholarship, and on some of the current trends we briefly discussed in this lecture, we see that New Testament scholars frequently oscillate between the two figures in Winchester's book. Many a professor may turn out to be a madman (take, for example, recent proposals that the Gospel of John was written by Thomas, Lazarus or Mary Magdalene),⁴⁵ and perhaps occasionally someone considered to be a madman may in the end emerge as a professor. In this regard, contemporary scholars are not unlike the apostle Paul, whose defense before Porcius Festus, the Roman governor, was interrupted by the latter with the words, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane" (Acts 26:24). It appears that for some scholars, at least, being considered a madman—or at least a maverick—may be a necessary price to pay for engaging in scholarship and for pushing the frontiers of human learning.

ENDNOTES

*Faculty lecture delivered May 11, 2006, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

¹Cited in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Marks of a Scholar* (Wake Forest, NC: n.d.), 1.

²For previous assessments, see Martin Hengel, “Aufgaben der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft,” *NTS* 40 (1994): 321–57; Craig L. Blomberg, “Critical Issues in New Testament Studies for Evangelicals Today,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 51–79; Markus Bockmuehl, “‘To Be or Not to Be’: The Possible Futures of New Testament Scholarship,” *SJT* 51/3 (1998) 271–306; Thomas R. Schreiner, “New Testament Theology,” in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought. Essays in Honor of Millard J. Erickson* (ed. David S. Dockery; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 46–68; and Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne, eds., *The Face of New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). See also Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002); and *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, is the first in the projected 40-volume Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. The first two volumes in the Two Horizons series (THNTC) were published by

Eerdmans in 2005: Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians and Philemon*; and Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*.

⁵Ibid., 19–20.

⁶Ibid., 20–21. The following discussion summarizes the thrust of Vanhoozer’s comments on pp. 20–25.

⁷Andreas J. Köstenberger, gen. ed., *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).

⁸Series editor: Andreas J. Köstenberger.

⁹Scott Hafemann, ed., *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002).

¹⁰Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997 [1992] and 1999); James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

¹¹Adolf Schlatter, *The History of the Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 18.

¹²Vanhoozer, *DTIB*, 21.

¹³Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 415, citing R. T. France, “The Church and the Kingdom of God,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization* (ed. D. A. Carson; Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 42.

¹⁴Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 18.

¹⁵Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (London: SCM, 1970).

¹⁶See footnote 10 above.

¹⁷Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934); ET: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). Cf. my essay “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament” in Hafemann, *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, 144–58.

¹⁸James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990 [1977]).

¹⁹Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1979); *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003); Bart Ehrman, *The Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁰See Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Da Vinci Code: Is Christianity True?* (Wake Forest, NC, 2006); and other resources posted at the author’s website, www.biblicalfoundations.org.

²¹Paul Trebilco, “Christian Communities in Western Asia Minor into the Early Second Century: Ignatius and Others as Witnesses against Bauer,” *JETS* 49/1 (2006).

²²*Ibid.*, V. Conclusions.

²³Darrell L. Bock, *Missing Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), Chapter 5.

²⁴Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵See the review of Hill's work by Andreas J. Köstenberger in *JETS* 48/2 (2005): 390–93.

²⁶See the inside jacket of Bart Ehrman's *Lost Christianities*.

²⁷The title of David R. Liefeld's essay is, "God's Word or Male Words?" *JETS* 48/3 (2005): 449–73. See esp. the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. For a careful yet trenchant critique of feminist and egalitarian hermeneutics see Margaret E. Köstenberger, "A Critique of Feminist and Egalitarian Hermeneutics: With Special Focus on Jesus' Approach to Women" (Th.D. diss., 2005).

²⁸James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); idem, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

²⁹See D. A. Carson, "Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?" in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 2: *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (ed. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 83–145.

³⁰Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, " 'What Is Truth?' Pilate's Question in Its Johannine and Larger Biblical Context," in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* 144, n. 16, with reference to Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 776.

³¹Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 766 (cited in Köstenberger, "What Is Truth?," 144, n. 16).

³²Andrew T. Lincoln, “Reading John: The Fourth Gospel under Modern and Postmodern Interrogation,” in *Reading the Gospels Today* (McMaster New Testament Studies; ed. Stanley E. Porter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 147 and 132 (cited in Köstenberger, “What Is Truth?,” 21 and 144, n. 17). At a recent debate on the campus of Southeastern Seminary, Richard Hays made a similar point as part of a panel discussion on *The Da Vinci Code*.

³³N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005).

³⁴See on this the examples cited in Köstenberger, *Is Christianity True?*, 5–6.

³⁵D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001 and 2004).

³⁶Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

³⁷Daniel Wallace, “The Gospel according to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman,” *JETS* (June 2006).

³⁸Timothy George, “A Peace Plan for the Gender War,” *Christianity Today* 49/11 (November 2005): 50–56, including “A Modest [9-point] Proposal” on pp. 52–53.

³⁹Forthcoming in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*; posted at www.henryinstitute.org.

⁴⁰Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (ed. Ken M. Campbell; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 33–102, esp. 40–61.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 41.

⁴²Douglas J. Moo, “‘As Free as Necessary . . .’: The Pragmatics of a Translation Philosophy”; Mark Strauss, “Do literal Bible versions show greater respect for plenary inspiration? (A response to Wayne Grudem)”; *JBMW* 10/2 (Fall 2005).

⁴³Daniel Akin, in a message to the “Southeastern family,” dated 9/27/2005, called the TNIV “a defective and inadequate translation” that he cannot recommend for “use in . . . teaching and preaching ministry.” See also Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004). On the other side of the issue are D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998); and Douglas Moo, professor at Wheaton and chairman of the Committee on Bible Translation which is charged with translating the TNIV. Notably, Carson, Strauss, and Moo all hold to a complementarian (or “patricentric”?) view of gender roles.

⁴⁴Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998; paperback 2005).

⁴⁵See my recent blog entitled “Who Wrote John’s Gospel?” at www.biblicalfoundations.org.