



The Delightful Adventure of Hard Work

Maybe I was just lucky, but I never studied under any of those critical Bible scholars who supposedly were only interested in the historical minimum or the so-called world behind the text. My teachers, schooled in the critical methodologies of the enlightenment, certainly cared about history and the setting of the biblical texts, but their interest was impelled by their concern to hear as clearly as possible the word of God in, with, and under the biblical words.

Now, various other methodologies are after the same thing. Some of them call themselves post-critical or post-enlightenment, rightly cautious of the hegemony of certain predetermined ways of viewing the world and understanding “history” in much of modern study. Yet, if our interest is in the Bible, a historical book of an incarnational faith, we will forgo historical investigation at our peril. I am happy to have learned new and helpful things about the nature and function of literature, including the Bible, since leaving graduate school. I am equally happy to have entered this newer arena as one steeped in a historical pot.

The two concerns came together a few years ago when the Old Testament department at our school was required to clarify its “goals.” We wrote:

The department affirms that the goal of a critical reading of the Scriptures is not to set oneself over against the text, but rather to allow the text to speak its word of truth as clearly as possible. We approach the text in serious study precisely because we are convinced that God speaks through the text.

Such study, we agreed, will ask students to become familiar with the basic critical and literary methodologies (which we briefly outlined), but will also

cultivate an appreciation of the biblical texts which approaches them with reverence and delight, with humor and mystery, with artistic sensitivity and hard work, with adventure and imagination.

These goals are still shared by our department, though we have since adjusted the curriculum to try to achieve them more effectively in a changing cultural setting; they are also shared by *Word & World*, and they shaped the motivation behind the theme of this issue.

Claus Westermann studied the classical theological curriculum in his university education, but he tells us here that he first became a theologian in a seminary of the Confessing Church when confronted by the need to hear the Bible in the contemporary crisis of Nazism. His reflection on the place of the Bible in his life

and the life of the church will help readers think about how to hear the biblical message in our own contemporary crises.

Richard Nysse and *Donald Juel* provide something of a keynote essay to the theme of this issue. Without rejecting historical concerns, they seek a method of biblical interpretation which will do justice to its claims to truth—a discomfiting, but necessary issue for readers of faith.

In his study of the persuasive power of prayer in the Old Testament, *Patrick Miller* teaches us not only about the Bible on prayer, but also about the Bible on God. Taken seriously, his analysis (like the Bible itself) will encourage prayer of a rather insistent sort.

What happens when we use the Bible to interpret or define Christian ministry? *Terence Fretheim* suggests this may require us to think differently about things as close to our theological hearts as salvation itself. The Bible, it seems, defines salvation more broadly than much of Christian tradition.

Is there a place for Mary in Protestantism? *Beverly Gaventa* examines Mary's role in the gospels and suggests that her portrayal includes insights fundamental to the gospel and to ministry in the name of that gospel.

Ronald Olson tells us how his mind is changing about preaching. Once concerned with conveying what the text itself "means," he now finds himself asking how the preacher's conversation with the text and with the congregation shapes the emerging sermon.

Nancy Koester wonders why people participate in Bible study groups at all. She urges those who do to consider working through entire biblical books. Both leaders and participants in such groups will be encouraged by her observations.

In a disturbing preliminary report on a project studying congregational life, *Patrick Keifert* finds little actual use of the Bible in moral decision-making within congregations. His study will, no doubt, cause alarm and should, we hope, produce appropriate response.

Peter Nash reminds us that all reading of the Bible is cross-cultural (we are not ancients!) and that some biblical texts provide particularly interesting examples of God's concern for people outside the traditional religious establishment.

Since this issue of *Word & World* appears almost exactly on the 50th anniversary of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, often called the Magna Charta of Roman Catholic biblical studies, we are pleased to include *John Donahue's* analysis of the sweeping effect of that encyclical. One effect was the full participation of Catholic scholars in the ecumenical world of biblical scholarship, which became a very significant impetus for modern Catholic-Protestant dialogues.

Two parish pastors, *Michael Purcell* and *John Tietjen*, argue the merits and deficiencies of the megachurch in our Face to Face encounter. Though each speaks from a Lutheran perspective, their remarks will no doubt be applicable to other Christian traditions as well. In *Texts in Context*, *Wendell Debner* provides several possible themes and ideas for Advent sermons on the Series B Gospels.

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