

# The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology

*Edited by*

Gareth Jones



# The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology

## Blackwell Companions to Religion

The Blackwell Companions to Religion series presents a collection of the most recent scholarship and knowledge about world religions. Each volume draws together newly commissioned essays by distinguished authors in the field, and is presented in a style which is accessible to undergraduate students, as well as scholars and the interested general reader. These volumes approach the subject in a creative and forward-thinking style, providing a forum in which leading scholars in the field can make their views and research available to a wider audience.

### Published

*The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*

Edited by Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck

*The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*

Edited by Richard K. Fenn

*The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*

Edited by Leo G. Perdue

*The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*

Edited by Graham Ward

*The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*

Edited by Gavin Flood

*The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*

Edited by Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh

*The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism*

Edited by Alister E. McGrath and Darren C. Marks

*The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*

Edited by Gareth Jones

*The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*

Edited by William Schweiker

*The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*

Edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells

### Forthcoming

*The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*

Edited by Robert A. Segal

*The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*

Edited by Ken Parry

*The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*

Edited by Arthur Holder

*The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*

Edited by John Sawyer

*The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*

Edited by David Aune

# The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology

*Edited by*

Gareth Jones

© 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd  
except for editorial material and organization © 2004 by Gareth Jones

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA  
108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK  
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Gareth Jones to be identified as the Author of the Editorial Material in this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for*

ISBN 0–631–20685–X

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10 on 12.5 pt Photina  
by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom  
by MPG Books Limited, Bodmin, Cornwall

Index compiled by Meg Davies, Registered Indexer,  
Society of Indexers.

For further information on  
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:  
<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com>

# Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Preface	xii
<b>Part I Theology and . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1 The Practice of Faith <i>Robin Gill</i>	3
2 Biblical Studies <i>John Barton</i>	18
3 Philosophy <i>David B. Burrell</i>	34
4 Culture <i>Charles T. Mathewes</i>	47
5 Social Theory <i>Don Browning</i>	65
6 Theological Anthropology <i>Ray Anderson</i>	82
7 History <i>William Dean</i>	95
<b>Part II History</b>	<b>111</b>
8 Patristics <i>G. R. Evans and Morwenna Ludlow</i>	113
9 Medieval Theology <i>Stephen F. Brown</i>	133
10 Reformation <i>Carl R. Trueman</i>	147
11 Modernity <i>Garrett Green</i>	162
<b>Part III Themes</b>	<b>181</b>
12 Trinity <i>Bruce D. Marshall</i>	183
13 Incarnation <i>John Webster</i>	204

14	Redemption	<i>Esther D. Reed</i>	227
15	Eschatology	<i>Andrew Chester</i>	243
16	Church and Sacraments	<i>Gavin D'Costa</i>	258
<b>Part IV Key Modern Figures</b>			277
17	Kant	<i>Gareth Jones</i>	279
18	Hegel	<i>Merold Westphal</i>	293
19	Schleiermacher	<i>Dawn DeVries</i>	311
20	Barth	<i>Mark Lindsay</i>	327
21	Rahner	<i>Karen Kilby</i>	343
22	Bonhoeffer	<i>John W. de Gruchy</i>	357
23	Bultmann and Tillich	<i>James M. Byrne</i>	372
24	Von Balthasar	<i>Mark McIntosh</i>	388
<b>Part V Contemporary Issues</b>			403
25	Christianity and Other Religions	<i>Ian Markham</i>	405
26	Economics and Social Justice	<i>Martyn Percy</i>	418
27	Feminism	<i>Patricia Daniel</i>	434
28	Rediscovery of Mysticism	<i>Ralph Norman</i>	449
29	The Context of Eco-theology	<i>Laurel Kearns</i>	466
30	Drama, Film and Postmodernity	<i>Richard Arrandale</i>	485
31	Race	<i>M. Shawn Copeland</i>	499
32	Science	<i>Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly</i>	512
Index			557



# Contributors

**Ray Anderson** is Senior Professor of Theology and Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is the author of many books and articles, the most recent including *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (2003) and *Spiritual Caregiving as Secular Sacrament: A Practical Theology for Professional Caregivers* (2003). His current research interests center on a post-theistic evangelical theology.

**Richard Arrandale** taught religion and theology at Christ Church University College in Canterbury, Kent, from 1997 to 2003, and he is currently pursuing a career as a freelance writer on mysticism and new age spiritualities, based in Glastonbury, UK. His publications include articles on the work of Antonin Artaud, the tensions between psychology and theology, and the interface between religion and postmodernism.

**John Barton** is the Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford. Among his many publications are *The Spirit and the Letter* (1997) and (with John Muddiman) his edition of the *Oxford Bible Commentary* (2001). His current research interests center on a project on the nature of biblical criticism.

**Stephen F. Brown** is Director of the Institute of Medieval Philosophy and Theology at Boston College, Massachusetts. He is editor of five volumes of the *Opera Philosophica et Theologica* of William of Ockham, and editor of *Bonaventure: The Journey of the Mind to God* and *Aquinas, on Faith and Reason*. He is author of more than fifty articles on medieval philosophy and theology. He is currently working on an edition of Book 1 of Richard Fishacre's *Commentary on the Sentences* and collecting a number of translated medieval texts dealing with the development of theology as a scientific university discipline.

**Don Browning** is Alexander Campbell Professor of Religious Ethics and the Social Sciences Emeritus of the Divinity School, University of Chicago. His most recent publication is *Marriage and Modernization: Why Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do*

*about It* (2003). He is also Director of the Religion, Culture, and Family Project located at the University of Chicago.

**David B. Burrell**, CSC, is Hesburgh Professor of Philosophy and Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and author most recently of *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, as well as translator of al-Ghazali's *Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence*.

**James M. Byrne** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at St. Michael's College, Vermont. He is the author of *God: Thoughts in an Age of Uncertainty* (2001) and *Religion and Enlightenment* (1997), together with other articles and publications. His research interests center on philosophy and modern theology.

**Andrew Chester** is Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is the author of many books and articles, including work on the Pentateuchal Targums and the Letter of James. His research interests center on messianic hope and eschatology in early Judaism and Christianity.

**M. Shawn Copeland** is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Boston College, Massachusetts, and (adjunct) Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Xavier University, Louisiana. Her academic research and publications include the areas of theological and philosophical anthropology, political theology and philosophy, and embodiment, with special attention to gender and race.

**Gavin D'Costa** is Reader in Christian Theology and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol, UK. He is a consultant to the Church of England, the Catholic Bishop's Conference, and the Vatican on issues regarding other religions. In 1998 he served as the Joseph McCarthy Visiting Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Recent publications include *The Trinity and the Meeting of Religions* (2000) and *Sexing the Trinity* (2000). His research interests are in contemporary theology, theology of religions, and gender and psychoanalysis.

**Patricia Daniel** teaches feminism and religious studies at Christ Church University College, Canterbury, and other institutions in Kent, UK. The author of several articles on feminist theologies, she continues to research in contemporary feminism.

**William Dean** is Professor of Constructive Theology at the Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado. Specializing in the distinctively American tradition of religious thought, his books include *American Religious Empiricism* (1986), *History Making History* (1988), *The American Spiritual Culture* (2002), and *The Religious Critic in American Culture* (1994), which received the American Academy of Religion Award for Excellence.

**Dawn DeVries** is John Newton Thomas Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Richmond, Virginia. She is currently working on a major study of Schleiermacher's dogmatic theology. She is the author of *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher* and the editor and translator of *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher*.

**G. R. Evans** is Professor of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge. She is the author of numerous books in the fields of patristic, medieval and ecumenical history and theology, including *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (1994), *Law and Theology in the Middle Ages* (2001), and *Anselm* (1998). She is also the author of *A Brief History of Heresy* (2003) and the editor of *The Medieval Theologians* and *The Early Christian Theologians*.

**Robin Gill** is Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK. He is the author of some twenty books, including most recently *Changing Worlds* (2002), *The "Empty" Church Revisited* (2003), and *A Sense of Grace* (2004).

**Garrett Green** teaches religious studies at Connecticut College. He is the author of *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (1998) and *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity* (2000). His current research centers on the relationship between philosophy, aesthetics, and modern theology, particularly contemporary debates about modernism and postmodernism.

**John W. de Gruchy** is Robert Selby Taylor Professor of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The author of many books and articles, he has recently edited the *Cambridge Companion to Bonhoeffer* (1999), as well as *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (2002). He remains deeply involved in the work for truth and reconciliation in South Africa, as well as continuing his long-term work on the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

**Gareth Jones** is Professor of Christian Theology and Director of the Centre for Anglican Studies, at Christ Church University College, Canterbury, UK. He was founder editor of *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, and was recently theological consultant to the House of Bishops of the Church of England. His publications include *Critical Theology* (1995) and *Christian Theology: A Brief Introduction* (1999), and his current research interests center on the role of theological reflection in the contemporary Anglican Communion.

**Laurel Kearns** is Associate Professor of Sociology of Religion and Environmental Studies at Drew Theological School and the Casperson School of Graduate Studies at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. She is co-editor of the Christianity-related articles for the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* and a member of the Religion and Ecology Steering Committee for the American Academy of Religion. Her research and writing have focused on religious (predominantly Christian) ecological activism, greening the ethnography of religion, and environmental justice.

**Karen Kilby** is Lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Nottingham, UK. She has written a brief introduction to the thought of Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner* (1997) and is about to publish a more substantial study, *Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*.

**Mark Lindsay** is Director of Studies at Trinity College, University of Melbourne. He has been researching the theological basis of Karl Barth's opposition to Nazism and the Holocaust, and has published a number of articles and chapters in the broad field of post-Holocaust theology.

**Mark McIntosh**, Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University, Chicago, is an Episcopal priest and canon theologian to the Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA. The author of *Mystical Theology* and other books investigating the intersection of spirituality and theology, he is also the author of the forthcoming *Blackwell Guide to Christian Theology*.

**Ian Markham** is the Dean of Hartford Seminary and Professor of Theology and Ethics, Hartford Seminary, Connecticut. He is the author of *Plurality and Christian Ethics* (1994), *Truth and the Reality of God* (1999), and *A Theology of Engagement* (2003). His current research centers on Christian and Hindu explanations for disagreement.

**Bruce D. Marshall** is Professor of Historical Theology at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, where he teaches medieval and Reformation studies, and systematic theology. He is the author of several books and articles, including *Christology in Conflict* (1987) and *Trinity and Truth* (2000). His research interests include the Trinity and Christology, philosophical issues in theology, and Judaism and Christian theology.

**Charles T. Mathewes** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, where he teaches theology, ethics, and culture. He is the author of *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* and the forthcoming *A Theology of Public Life during the World*. His research interests center on moral and political theory and Christian doctrine.

**Ralph Norman** is Lecturer in Historical Theology at Christ Church University College at Canterbury, Kent, UK. His monograph on the doctrine of the ascension is in preparation, and his current research interests center on the doctrine of God.

**Martyn Percy** is Director of the Lincoln Theological Institute based at the University of Manchester, UK, where he is also Reader in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. His recent publications include *Salt of the Earth: Religious Resilience in a Secular Age* (2002). He is currently researching into Christianity and contemporary culture, and modern ecclesiology.

**Esther D. Reed** is Lecturer in Theology and Ethics at the University of St. Andrews, UK, and editor of *Studies in Christian Ethics*. She is author of *The Genesis of Ethics* (2000) and *A Theological Reading of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit", with Particular Reference to its Themes of Identity, Alienation and Community* (1996). Her current research interests lie in the ethics of human rights and Protestant traditions of natural law associated with Richard Hooker, Robert Sanderson, Hugo Grotius, and more recent thinkers in this tradition.

**Robert John Russell** is Founder and Director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences and Professor of Theology and Science in Residence, at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. He is co-editor of the 5-volume CTNS/Vatican Observatory series on science and divine action. He is currently working on the book, *Time in Eternity: Theology and Science in Mutual Interaction*, for which he won a PCRS/Templeton Grant for research and writing on the constructive engagement of religion and science.

---

**Carl R. Trueman** is Associate Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is author of *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525–1556* (1997) and *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (1998). His current research interests include seventeenth century Reformed Orthodoxy in relation to medieval and Renaissance thought.

**John Webster** is Professor of Systematic Theology at Aberdeen University, having until recently been Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford. He is the author of many books and articles on modern and systematic theology, including most recently *Holiness* (2003), and he edited the *Cambridge Companion to Barth* (2000). His research interests center on constructive Christian dogmatics and modern historical theology, with particular interest in Barth's theology in the 1920s.

**Merold Westphal** is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University in New York City. He is past president of the Hegel Society of America and of the Søren Kierkegaard Society, and has served as Executive Co-Director of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP). He is the author of *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (1979), *Hegel, Freedom, and Modernity* (1992), and *Overcoming Onto-Theology* (2001), among many other publications.

# Preface

## What is “Modern Theology”?

Attempts to define Christian theology can be notoriously facile. One is often told that such theology is “faith seeking understanding.” Alternately, it is often remarked that theology is the interpretation of doctrine, so that one regards interpretation as the business of testing and applying doctrine to the experienced life of the Church. Richard Hooker defined theology as “the science of things divine,” and developing Hooker’s statement is Locke’s famous definition of theology, from 1698:

Theology, which, containing the knowledge of God and his creatures, our duty to him and our fellow-creatures, and a view of our present and future state, is the comprehension of all other knowledge, directed to its true end.

Each of these definitions works quite straightforwardly, as do many others. One of the things one constantly discovers is that if Christian theology is Christian talk of God, then the fact that there are many different ways of doing that in today’s world demonstrates that pluralism is inherent to any question of how to define theology. What matters then is to what extent such pluralism is true; or, better, to what extent theological ideas allow for different interpretations.

Attempts to define *modern* theology exacerbate this difficulty, for the singular reason that the concept “modernity” itself allows for no unambiguous definition. To support this argument, consider solely whether “modernity” is concerned with time, or scope. Is “modernity” a period of history, or is it a particular way of understanding? In other words, if one is attempting a first definition of modern theology, does one try to define a particular period of Christian history, with a start and an end, or does one try to define a way of thinking about Christian ideas that might be coterminous with a specific historical period, but which is intellectual rather than circumstantial?

If the former – as is often the case – then modern theology is roughly the period 1600–1980, with early modernity arguably evident in the sixteenth century, and late

modernity giving way to postmodernity in the 1980s. If the latter, then modern theology “begins” when people seek to think about their faith in terms of the world in which they live, rather than the other way round. One *might* characterize this intellectual definition in relation to time – one might still trace its origin to around 1600, for example – but the essential quality is the way of thinking, rather than the historic moment when it started to occur.

These initial definitions need greater attention, however. If the governing factor is time, then questions about modernity’s beginnings and ends, and hence questions about premodernity and postmodernity, become identifiable with specific historical texts and contexts, ideas and arguments. As a way of testing this argument, one can consider how it works as a way of interpreting a classic text. And, taking a text that is well beyond the usual scope of modern theology (if modernity is defined temporally), then one can legitimately ask whether or not Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a work of modern theology, and thereby whether or not modernity itself is a viable concept in interpreting a text written in 1321. On this reading, it is clearly nonsensical to argue that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a modern text, since overwhelmingly scholarship contends that modern theology “begins” no earlier than the mid-sixteenth century. The argument is elementary: 1321 is earlier than 1550; *quod erat demonstrandum*.

If modernity is defined in terms of scope, however, the situation becomes much more complex. Considering the same, unusual example, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, one now has to ask whether or not the text itself betrays what one might call a modern theological understanding of the relationship between God and the world, and then whether or not this betrayal is deliberate or accidental; i.e., intended by Dante, or not. If Dante intended to write a text that demonstrates a modern understanding of the relationship between God and the world, then his *Divine Comedy* is a work of modern theology, whether or not it was written in 1321.

Such an exercise requires that one first decide what criteria one considers fundamental to one’s definition of modernity. That argument, however, is itself circular, because: What comes first, a modern understanding, or criteria of the modern? Or, stated more clearly: What possible criteria for defining modernity can one identify, that do not arise naturally from the texts that were written in modern times? One recognizes the problem: criteria of interpretation that are alien to the texts to be interpreted are often worse than useless.

All of this becomes quickly and unnecessarily baffling, almost as if the sheer difficulty of defining the way Christians speak of God is not in itself sufficiently difficult. For the sake of argument, therefore, this *Companion* grants that questions of historical contingency – *time* – are secondary to questions of critical thinking – *scope* – and that consequently modern theology is to be defined in terms of how we consider the problems that arise when theologians attempt to understand the relationship between God and the world. Here we can make a first assertion that governs the philosophy of this volume: *modern* theology begins when theologians look beyond the Church for answers to their questions.

Such an argument allows one to focus upon certain key texts, individuals, themes, and arguments, whilst not covering others. To some extent it is arbitrary, of course: decisions about inclusion and exclusion generally are. Modern theology has a

manageable shape, however, one that has been recognized and studied for several generations, and one that remains largely normative for how one understands much Christian reflection in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. It is characterized by questions of engagement with philosophy, society, science, and culture, and populated – if that is the right term – by such figures as Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Barth, and Rahner. It is a period when certain ways of interpreting Christian ideas arrived at new definitions of history and eschatology, for example, or the central doctrines of the Christian faith. And it was – is – a period when new challenges arose to make people think about their faith with renewed urgency. As indicated, however, one key intellectual idea characterizes these attempts: people start to look beyond the Church for answers to their questions.

### **Dante's *Divine Comedy***

Naturally enough, therefore, the vast majority of texts and ideas that will be considered in this volume come from the period when people started looking beyond the Church for answers to their questions, after approximately 1700. To find a way into a more nuanced definition, however, one may reconsider Dante's *Divine Comedy* at this point, making a distinction between medieval and modern theologies that is informative. The traditional way to understand Dante's poem is to view it as a reflection upon the tension between philosophy and theology, personified in the figures of Virgil and Dante respectively. On this reading philosophy leads the pilgrim – Dante – into a sequence of reflections and encounters, principally with the consequences of moral failings. This process is characterized by a high degree of openness, so that for Virgil reason is given free rein to address the questions humanity faces in understanding itself morally.

This process, however, is very limited: it can lead Dante through Hell and into Purgatory, for example, but it cannot cross the boundary of Purgatory, into Heaven itself. Why? Because Heaven is the realm of God and the Church, and only faith – and faith-thinking, or theology – can find its way in that world. Heaven is *closed*; and it “opens” only to the eyes of faith, not to those of reason. Virgil, therefore, is literally incapable of guiding Dante into Heaven, because he cannot “see” Heaven, a reality that afflicts him and which characterizes his state in Limbo, as Dante describes in the *Purgatorio* of the *Divine Comedy*:

I am Virgil; and for no other crime  
Than not having faith, I lost heaven . . .  
(*Purgatorio* VII. 7–8)<sup>1</sup>

On this reading, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a work of medieval theology because medieval theology is characterized by an emphasis upon a closed universe, ordered by God and intelligible solely to God. Philosophy, it is true, pushes toward openness, so that one might argue that certain forms of scholastic theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries find their center in the debate over the proper limits of reason, and



the extent to which they can play any role in theological reflection. That tension – between closure and openness, faith and reason – is central to Dante, as I have argued; but it is also central to the greater world of medieval and scholastic theologies. And, for Dante at least, it is a tension that can only be resolved in favor of closure, because God’s world is the *locus* of God’s being, and God’s being is not open to human thought.

There is at least one other way to read Dante, however, and it is what I have characterized as the modern reading of the *Divine Comedy*. On this reading the tension between philosophy and theology is not antagonistic, and cannot be characterized in terms of a juxtaposition of openness and closure. Rather, the subject matter of both philosophy and theology is the same, namely, human being. The sole difference, admittedly a significant one, is that philosophy and theology approach this subject matter from different perspectives, and with different presuppositions; or, stated more clearly, they give different answers to the same questions.

One of the clearest examples of this process at work in twentieth-century thought was in the relationship between the philosopher Martin Heidegger and the theologian Rudolf Bultmann. For both Heidegger and Bultmann the proper subject matter of reflection was human being, something which both men thought was best intelligible in terms of existentialist analysis. As Bultmann readily acknowledged, Heidegger’s historical phenomenological analysis of the conditions of possibility of authentic existence is as useful for theology as it is for philosophy. Why? Because human being is evidently human existence, and as such requires understanding prior to asking more fundamental – transcendental – questions of it. As Bultmann wrote in his 1925 essay “What does it mean to speak about God?”: “Before one can speak of God, one must first be able to speak of man.”

Once that analysis had been achieved, Heidegger and Bultmann undoubtedly wanted to go in different directions, the former toward the non-religious category Being, the latter towards God and an understanding of human existence before God: *coram deo*, as Bultmann knew it from his Lutheran tradition. For the sake of our question about *modernity*, however, this distinction is irrelevant. What matters is that both Heidegger and Bultmann agree on the fundamental questions *and* some of their answers. Or, to state it in terms of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: Virgil and Dante are able to travel the same road, because they both understand the same road map. And that road map, though it ultimately comes from God – as Virgil well knows – is *our* road map, for better or for worse, and as such we have to understand it by any moral and intellectual means possible.

I think this model offers a very important way of thinking about modern theology. The idea of terrain that can be mapped has been used to speak both of divine action – in the form of God’s revelation in Christ – and of human responses to that divine action. In both senses the key idea is that there is something that can be known, and something that can be said about what is known, that has distinct limits or boundaries. One is mapping something with a clear “shape,” in other words, a clear shape that permits an accurate rendition. Such an idea characterizes quite a lot of biblical or doctrinal interpretation in Church history, actually, albeit in a fairly crude manner.

The model that informs this volume is somewhat different, however. Instead of a single map for a single terrain, therefore, this volume allows that the terrain of God’s

relationship with the world looks different when seen from different perspectives, and that consequently different maps will be appropriate for different people in different situations. The old question about maps, therefore – are they accurate? – is replaced by a new one: are they useful? Or better: Do they have value and meaning? Do they represent the world and God’s relationship with it as it is viewed by certain people in certain places? Returning to Dante and Virgil, it becomes not so much a question of identifying *the* route through Hell and Purgatory, as *their* route through Hell and Purgatory. It is a huge difference, one that clearly indicates the shift toward a modern concern with peoples’ contextualized perspectives and interpretations.

For what it is worth, I do not think Dante’s *Divine Comedy* really allows such a thoroughgoing modern reading; it is a medieval text from the fourteenth century, and it does present a closed world in which all questions are resolved by heavenly answers. That does not mean, however, that the modern reading has no virtues, and that looking at Christian history and its texts from the modern perspective is pointless. It is after all the basic premise of hermeneutic theory that meaning can be *translated* from context to context, generated by the interaction between text and interpreter. The modern reading of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, therefore, is just that: a reading. As such it merits understanding not simply because it might be historically significant – and for better or worse, modern theology is a massive dimension of the history of Christian reflection – but also because it sheds light on the original, which is God’s relationship with the world, and Christian witness to the many dimensions of God’s presence and absence.

A “Companion to Modern Theology,” consequently, is not simply a companion to a particular period of Christian history, or a particular set of figures, ideas, and challenges. It is also a companion to a way of thinking through the main principles and values of Christianity, its relevance for the world as well as the Church, and the great contributions all kinds of intellectual reflection make to the life of faith seeking understanding. As indicated, the point of such a volume is to provide a road map, with certain important routes through the terrain of modern theology, the general shape of that discipline and, perhaps most importantly, how it works as a line of inquiry. Or better: how it works as *lines* of inquiry, for one of the most valuable insights students can have is that there are many different ways of understanding modern theology, and a lot of them are plausible accounts of the subjects under discussion. Good students will realize this fact, and good textbooks will help them appreciate it.

## **The Structure of this Book**

What the reader should expect to find in this book, therefore, is a series of essays that build up a thorough, composite picture of modern theology in terms of its major themes and issues, figures and movements. To use again the image of the road map, the book should work as a series of indications by which one can navigate the subject matter. And since there can be, by definition, no one road map that is absolutely perfect – no one account of modern theology that is complete and unchallengeable – so the student has to work with the material in these essays, using them to provoke thoughts and argu-

ments and their own lines of inquiry that will take them more deeply into modern theology's pertinent questions.

As importantly, then, the student should also be clear about what she will *not* find in this textbook. She will not find objective accounts of important names, events, and ideas, as if these can be presented separately from their intellectual and socio-historical contexts. She will not find texts that can be filleted, rather as one fillets a fish, in order to arrive at the "basic facts" that can then be utilized in an essay or assignment. There *are* textbooks like that, some of them very successful, but they tend to deaden argument, rather than encourage it. If modern theology is something worth studying, if it offers ideas and arguments that are worth studying, then it must be because it stimulates people to have their own thoughts about the basic themes and beliefs of Christianity, and the ways in which people talk about those themes and beliefs. Modern theology *must* stimulate thought and argument: that is the basic premise that has guided the creation of this book and its constituent chapters.

### **What Does the Book Look Like in Detail, Therefore?**

After this Preface has set out some basic points about the scope of the volume in general, Part I introduces readers to the essential perspectives and engagements that have shaped the development of modern theology, and consequently the way in which modern theological questions are still interpreted. Robin Gill's opening chapter, "The Practice of Faith," highlights the creative tensions between how one looks at the interpretation of faith and the practical questions that lead on to questions of moral and cultural relevance. Gill leads the reader through some of these tensions, using a close reading of certain biblical passages to illustrate the points he wants to make to challenge the reader to think again about faith and practice, not as an end in itself, but as a challenge to all responsible theological reflection. Part of this debate is inevitably about the authority of the Bible, and in his chapter "Biblical Studies" John Barton offers a lucid account of how the interpretation of the Bible has been shaped by modern thought, and also how biblical interpretation has itself influenced the development of modern theology.

Taken together, therefore, the essays by Gill and Barton address one of the most natural of all starting points for modern theology, which should make readers think about how they want to assess questions of origin and authority in modern theology in general. The chapters by David B. Burrell and Charles Mathewes, on philosophy and culture respectively, take up similar challenges, but consider quite different subjects. As well as the important points Burrell and Mathewes make about philosophy and culture in their essays, what is also significant is the way in which they demonstrate that philosophical reflection is inherently cultural, and cultural reflection is inherently philosophical. Philosophy and culture can be considered together, as faith and the Bible can be considered together, each pair challenging the reader to reconsider some basic assumptions about the character of modern theology.

The remaining essays in the first section also work in similar ways. Thus, the chapters by Don Browning and Ray Anderson, on social theory and theological anthropol-

ogy respectively, work together to build up a sense of the way in which modern theology's engagement with these disciplines has altered how we understand Christian claims about the ways in which people live together. Again, the chapter on history by William Dean offers sustained readings of the deep structures of abiding intellectual questions for modern theology, bringing together many of the previous questions in Part I, but centered now on specific hermeneutic problems.

Taken as a whole, therefore, Part I should stimulate the reader to look at modern theology's relations with these lines of inquiry with fresh eyes. The nine essays of Parts II and III continue this approach, dividing into two main groups, one considering the central doctrines of the Christian faith, the other the principal periods of Christian history that modern theology is charged to interpret. The chapters by G. R. Evans and Morwenna Ludlow on patristics, Stephen Brown on the medieval Church, Carl Trueman on the Reformation, and Garrett Green on modernity, all look afresh at the interpretive challenges students face when they consider the issues for modern theology raised by these doctrines and historical periods. The chapters by Bruce Marshall on the Trinity, John Webster on the incarnation, Esther Reed on redemption, Andrew Chester on eschatology, and Gavin D'Costa on Church and sacraments, build up an image of the major doctrinal "building blocks," the taught ideas that modern theology then interprets.

Students should not, I repeat, expect to find "complete" and "factual" accounts of these doctrines and periods in these nine essays though. There are original and sophisticated considerations with significant claims to authority and sound judgment. Their real significance for this book as a whole, however, lies in their ability to continue the process begun in Part I: i.e. drawing students into the ways in which modern theology functions as a series of intellectual arguments and models. To use an oft-cited example from the way in which language works, the first sixteen essays in this book offer a provocative and original take on the grammar and syntax of modern theology, revealing the ways in which it communicates in order to help students themselves to understand better the challenges they face when they want to think about this subject.

If Parts I–III offer the grammar and syntax of modern theology, then it is fair to say that Part IV provides a series of chapters that consider the figures who create the significant vocabulary of the discipline. Certain of these essays, for example my own on Kant, Merold Westphal's on Hegel, and Dawn DeVries's on Schleiermacher, look at figures who, though long dead, can fairly claim to be the progenitors of modern theology in particular, and indeed modern thought in general. Similarly, the remaining chapters in this part, Mark Lindsay on Barth, Karen Kilby on Rahner, John de Gruchy on Bonhoeffer, James Byrne on Bultmann and Tillich, and Mark McIntosh on von Balthasar, all consider some of the great figures of twentieth-century theology. Discerning readers will immediately recognize that this list is not exclusive! There is no place, apparently, for Emil Brunner or Adolf von Harnack, nor for the liberation and feminist theologians who are so important for very recent theology. Nor, indeed, are there any figures other than dead white males in Part IV, which requires some explanation, perhaps.

The answer to this query is two-fold. First, the eight chapters in Part IV address highly significant figures: no one would wish to omit any of them. Again, each of these

essays brings into its discussion some of the other figures that one might argue characterize modern theology, so that, for example, Harnack and Brunner are present in these treatments, even if they do not feature in chapter headings. The rationale for Part IV apart, however, my second reason for structuring the book in this way and with these chapters is pedagogic: it has to do with how I want people to read Part V as well as Part IV. It has to do with understanding the great figures and ideas of more recent theology as explicit *challenges* to the ways in which we interpret modern theology, rather than offering further chapters about figures who might be viewed, however unfortunately, “in isolation.” To some extent that is inevitable with individuals like Kant and Hegel. It is not inevitable with feminism and race, however, and these enormous challenges and indeed responsibilities should never be treated as simply “figures” or “ideas” alongside other, perhaps far older and historic, figures and ideas.

The eight essays in Part V therefore take up this theme of challenge and responsibility, so that the pieces by Ian Markham on Christianity and other religions, Martyn Percy on economics and social justice, Patricia Daniel on feminism, Ralph Norman on the rediscovery of mysticism, Laurel Kearns on ecology, Richard Arrandale on drama, film and postmodernity, Shawn Copeland on race, and Robert John Russell and Kirk Wegter-McNelly on science, all resonate with this approach to their subjects. This list of eight challenges and responsibilities is not exhaustive, of course; no one would claim that, least of all the contributors, who have achieved astonishingly focused and pertinent treatments of their subjects. They are indicative, however, of the range of challenges and responsibilities that modern theology has faced and continues to face.

By the end of these thirty-two chapters readers will have a thorough knowledge of a very wide spectrum of material relevant to modern theology. They will also have a considerable palette of different ways to approach modern theology, and they will even have a sense of where modern theology has come from and, as importantly, where it is going. They will then have a sense – or many senses! – of how a textbook like this one relates to Graham Ward’s admirable one on postmodern theologies, *The Postmodern God*.<sup>2</sup> Remember the point about structure: modern theology is composite, and so is its interpretation. For those with energy and interest, therefore, these essays have bibliographical references and notes that continue these interpretations, leading the reader further into the complexities and subtleties of modern theological reflection.

That, in the final analysis, is what this textbook has been designed to achieve. Modern theology, unlike say postmodern theologies, permits an emphasis on methodology, on *how* to think through intellectual problems as critically as possible. That is not an accident: modern theology has often been closely related to notions of critical *education*, so that modern theology’s pedagogic influences can often be mirrored by an emphasis upon how today’s students might yet engage with its ideas and figures in order to learn how to think more clearly about the Christian faith.

Modern theology is also about collisions and tensions, however: collisions and tensions between ideas and individuals, as well as between the challenges and responsibilities that Christianity now faces and will continue to face in the foreseeable future. If this textbook has been put together, and its chapters written, with this critical model in mind, it is because one of the best ways to handle those challenges and responsibilities, the *business* of thinking and thereby owning modern theology’s concerns, is still

to reflect critically on modern theology's subject matter. Critical reflection is about intelligent engagement, and the student who remembers that point will not go far wrong in navigating the complexities of modern theology with the help of these thirty-two guides.

It remains to thank many people for their help and guidance in bringing this volume to publication. Reading through these essays again and again, I have always been impressed by their authors' integrity and commitment, not to mention sheer knowledge and understanding. I am similarly hugely grateful for the work of Valery Rose and her team of copy-editors. Rebecca Harkin, senior commissioning editor in theology at Blackwell Publishing, has marshalled everything beautifully. Last but not least, my wife, Nicky, has been the epitome of love and support in this enterprise as in everything in life and work.

### **Notes**

- 1 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. C. H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 225.
- 2 Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

## PART I

# Theology and . . .

1	The Practice of Faith	3
2	Biblical Studies	18
3	Philosophy	34
4	Culture	47
5	Social Theory	65
6	Theological Anthropology	82
7	History	95





## CHAPTER 1

# The Practice of Faith

Robin Gill

Within relatively homogeneous communities theology is typically understood as a scholarly activity undertaken by people of faith for others who share the same faith within a context of communal religious practice. Scholastic theology in medieval Europe would have been understood in this way. Anselm's celebrated depiction of theology as "faith seeking understanding" was written in the context of a society in which "faith," "religion," and "Catholicism" were all one and the same thing for his readers. In traditional Islamic societies today this is often still the dominant understanding of theology, as it remains among many communities of orthodox Jews, traditionalist Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, and amongst fundamentalist Protestants. However, since the introduction of modern forms of theological scholarship over the last 150 years, especially within university-based theology in the West, the relationship between faith, religious practice, and theology has become far more ambiguous. It can no longer be assumed that all of those studying, or indeed all of those teaching, academic theology share either the same faith or a common pattern of religious practice. A comparative rather than confessional approach to academic theology also ensures that a variety of contrasting faith positions and religious practices are analyzed critically. The theological pluralism of the academy now typically reflects the cultural pluralism of Western society at large. Yet even within this pluralistic context the role of faith and practice does not disappear.

In what follows I will look at the complex relationship between faith, practice, and theology that is apparent in different areas within academic theology in the West. To illustrate this relationship I will suggest how a single biblical story – Luke's story of the healing of ten lepers – might be studied in each of these different areas. In the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of Luke 17 this story reads as follows:

(11) On the way to Jerusalem [Jesus] was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. (12) And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance (13) and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." (14) When he saw them

he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. (15) Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; (16) and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. (17) Then Jesus said, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? (18) Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (19) And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

## **Faith and Biblical Studies**

It might be supposed that nobody would spend her life studying Christian Scriptures unless she was personally committed to those Scriptures and believed that they contained the key to salvation. Yet, in practice, there is as much tension here as in any other area of theology or religious studies in the Western academy. Many biblical scholars do indeed approach their subject from a perspective of faith and religious practice, but some do not. And even those who do, hold many different opinions on the authority of Scripture for their faith and religious practice. Pluralism and tension abound in this area of academic theology today.

At some levels this is hardly surprising. There are many technical aspects of biblical studies, such as the linguistic, source and textual areas, which require considerable skills but not faith as such. So, just as classical scholars can often derive pleasure and satisfaction from studying texts that are at variance with their own beliefs and commitments, it is not difficult to see how some secular scholars can approach biblical texts in a similar way. In both contexts there are intellectual challenges and puzzles that can fully engage the imaginations of those with the appropriate skills, but without involving any existential commitment on their part. Establishing the chronological order of the Synoptic Gospels, arguing in detail for or against the existence of Q, or recovering the most reliable Greek text of the New Testament, are not activities in themselves that require Christian faith. It might even be argued that such study sharpens skills that can then be applied to other more pragmatic areas of life. Ironically such an argument was used at the beginning of the twentieth century for the training of Anglican ordinands: typically they (and many other intellectuals) were required to study classics rather than theology as their training for ministry. Perhaps there was even a presumption that studying a work such as Plato's *Republic* (a particular favorite for that generation) improved the minds of ordinands rather more than studying the Bible.

By the middle of the twentieth century Anglican ordination training had changed very considerably. Now it was assumed, and not just by Anglican evangelicals, that a rigorous study of biblical exegesis was an essential part of ordination training. Yet, after a century of biblical criticism, the dominant assumption was that biblical exegesis must be conducted in a critical context – especially that of historical criticism. Nonetheless, biblical exegesis for Anglican ordinands of all descriptions was a confessional activity. It was studied to inform the future teaching and preaching ministry of these ordinands, who themselves constituted the majority of those studying theology at English universities (in Scotland there was a very similar pattern of male, Presbyterian ordinands

forming the majority of those studying theology at Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews or Aberdeen).

However, today the Western academy is radically transformed. In Britain (as elsewhere in Europe and North America) a majority of those studying theology in university are neither male nor ordinands and are not necessarily Anglicans (or, in Scotland, Presbyterians) at all; and biblical interpretation has assumed at least as large a role as biblical exegesis in the syllabus. As a result this syllabus can no longer presume that the function of biblical studies is to inform the teaching and preaching of (male) Anglican or Presbyterian ordinands. Such a confessional function has been replaced with a more comparative function. The syllabus in Biblical Studies is now more likely to require students to become familiar with different and contrasting patterns of hermeneutics. Biblical interpretation requires an awareness that across time and across different contemporary cultures (diachronically and synchronically) biblical texts are understood, interpreted and appropriated very differently. Pluralism and comparative critical study have once again entered the discipline. Biblical interpretation involves the exploration of different and sometimes contradictory faith communities as they have sought to use the Bible.

### *Illustration*

The story of ten lepers, in Luke's Gospel, can be studied without reference to faith at all. At the levels of textual scholarship and translation, the opening verse contains a number of possibilities. The RSV opts for "between Samaria and Galilee," but another possibility is "through the midst of Samaria and Galilee." Both the Greek text and the English translations of it have a number of possibilities, all of which struggle to make sense of the rather vague geography in the story. Some scholars have suggested that the problem here may go back to Luke himself and that he probably had a rather confused idea of inland boundaries. Other scholars have looked carefully at the language of the story, detecting in, for example, the next verse, Greek words that are typical of Luke's style of writing. Again this story can be studied from a perspective of Synoptic scholarship. It is found only in Luke, and uniquely it involves a simultaneous healing of ten people from the same disease, yet the final phrase "your faith has made you well" links it clearly to other Synoptic healing stories (Mark 5:24, Matthew 9:22, Luke 8:48, and Mark 10:52, Luke 18:42).

Biblical interpretation would suggest another way of approaching this story. Rather than being concerned to establish the original Greek text or to examine the story in relation to other stories in the Synoptic Gospels, biblical interpretation would be more concerned to understand the different ways it has been understood by various faith communities across time and across different contemporary cultures. Some might look at the various ways the story has been portrayed in art or in literature. Others might look at the role it has played in sermons in different ages. Others again might look at the different ways it has been received in modern Western countries with no direct experience of leprosy, compared with, say, parts of Africa where it is still endemic.

## Faith and Systematic Theology

Those who study academic theology in the West will encounter the work of historical and present-day systematic theology from a variety of contrasting, and sometimes competing, traditions. They will need, for example, to be as familiar with the writings of Thomas Aquinas as with those of Martin Luther and John Calvin. They will need to study, say, both Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. As with any other arts- or social science-based subject, it is usually considered to be inadequate to study the ideas of any single author without being able to relate those ideas critically to the competing ideas of others. Comparative, critical study is as important to systematic theology within the academy as it is to philosophy or to sociology. All three subjects can, of course, be taught in a confessional manner. At times Marxist sociology and various brands of philosophy have been taught in this way. However, the dominant approach within the Western academy is, either to discourage such confessional teaching, or to counter it with teaching using alternative confessional bases. Whether a critical and relatively detached approach is adopted, or a multi-confessional approach, the student of academic theology is inevitably confronted with a self-consciously pluralistic subject.

This has a number of implications for the relationship between faith and systematic theology:

- 1 Systematic theology becomes a form of history of ideas or sociology of knowledge. By juxtaposing competing understandings of theology, systematic theology becomes less the systematic exploration of the tenets of faith than a critical comparison of competing understandings of faith. Indeed, few of those who teach systematic theology within the modern academy have themselves written, or will ever write, a systematic theology. Rather they are scholars who have specialized in studying the written systematic theologies of past and present theologians. They may seek to trace the provenance of these ideas, as a history-of-ideas approach does in a variety of disciplines (and most notably within philosophy). Or they may seek additional connections between these changing ideas and changes within society at large, as the sociology of knowledge attempts to do. Yet both of these approaches have a strong tendency to locate faith in a comparative and critical context . . . it is the faith of others that is typically studied as much as one's own faith.
- 2 Systematic theology thus becomes more a comparative than a confessional form of study. Even if someone who teaches or studies theology has a strong commitment to faith and religious practice (as of course many, but not all, do), the very discipline in its modern form encourages critical comparison rather than confession. If ideas from competing theological traditions are studied in a scholarly manner in the modern academy, then they do need to be approached with a degree of sympathy. If they are dismissed too early, on some confessional basis, then their significance is likely to be overlooked. The careful comparison of divergent views sits uncomfortably with a mono-confessional and apologetic approach to theology.
- 3 The very process of modern academic theology makes it difficult to sustain an unquestioning faith. There is a clear difference between those people of faith who

have never heard their faith seriously challenged and those who retain their faith in the context of a pluralistic and critical academy. This remains the case even when the content of the two faiths appears to be identical. For example, people from these two contexts may have a similar belief in a personal God. Yet those in the pluralistic context are aware that this belief is challenged by many other people on a variety of grounds, whereas those in the first context do not. The faith of those in the pluralistic context is no longer an unquestioning faith: it is a faith held in contrast to (and sometimes in defiance of) others in society.

It would, though, be a mistake to assume from this that faith has little to do with systematic theology in the modern academy. Many, perhaps most, of those who actually write a systematic theology in the first place do have an explicit faith commitment located within a specific community of religious practice. It is clearly incumbent, then, on those studying a particular systematic theology to seek to understand that faith commitment – whether they share that commitment themselves or not. Again, many (but not all) students of systematic theology are drawn into the discipline precisely because they have a sense of “faith seeking understanding.” Just as many students of philosophy or the social sciences have a personal interest in their subject, so do many students of systematic theology. More than that, some people come to systematic theology because they are convinced that a mature faith needs a comparative and critical assessment. Systematic theology thus allows them to compare and contrast their own faith with that of others and, in the process, to refine and nuance their faith.

### *Illustration*

The story of ten lepers in Luke’s Gospel suggests a number of issues for a comparative and critical approach to Systematic theology. To take just two, there is the issue of miracles and their significance and there is the role of faith in the story. Both of these issues tend to divide theologians in ways that are fascinating for students today.

There has been much discussion within theology about the meaning and coherence of the concept of “miracle” (albeit the term itself is not used within this story), especially following David Hume’s provocative definition of a miracle as “a violation of the laws of nature.” In the fast developing literature on science and religion it is often argued that such a definition now appears anachronistic in a context of post-Newtonian physics. Physicists today are far less likely to talk about fixed “laws of nature” than they might have been in the past. As a result some theologians argue that those who dismiss the miraculous element in stories such as that of the ten lepers are simply the products of outdated philosophy of the Enlightenment. Others remain skeptical but argue that the story still has theological significance even without primitive notions of the miraculous. Much depends here upon the different understanding of God’s “actions” in the world and upon how far Christians in the modern world can sustain a world-view thoroughly at odds with prevailing culture.

Within the story the role of faith is clearly important. Yet there is an ambiguity here that has puzzled and divided theologians. The normal expectation within healing stories

in the Synoptic Gospels is that faith necessarily precedes healing. So, for example, in the story of the woman with a hemorrhage (Mark 5:34, Matthew 9:22, Luke 8:48), she too is told that “your faith has made you well.” But in the story of the ten lepers only one of the lepers is told this, when all ten had been healed. Why is he alone told this? One explanation is that all ten had faith and were therefore healed, but only one was specifically commended because he gave thanks. A more conservative explanation is that the tenth differed because he alone was “saved”: the others were healed of their leprosy but not actually “saved.” Neither explanation is particularly satisfactory (the second, for example, does not account for why this story uses the phrase “your faith has made you well” in a different way from other stories). Yet the two explanations do suggest very different traditions of theology behind them.

### **Faith and Religious Studies**

A further process of refinement is possible for those who are prepared to compare and contrast their own faith with that of non-Christian religious traditions. Sometimes termed comparative theology (rather than what was once termed “comparative religion”), Christian theology is set within a broader context of, say, Jewish theology or Islamic theology, in an attempt to identify and perhaps evaluate points of convergence and divergence.

Such an approach is not without its critics. Some, following Karl Barth, would reject it on the grounds that Christianity is not “a religion.” The uniqueness of Christian faith means that it is always mistaken to compare it with any other so-called “faith,” whether this faith is a secular form of “faith” or one drawn from one or other of the world religions. On this understanding Christian faith is wholly incomparable, so any attempt at such comparison inevitably involves serious distortion. Christian faith is based solely upon the Word of God made known uniquely in Jesus Christ, not upon some shared religious experience common to humanity or upon some knowledge of God derived independently of Jesus Christ.

In contrast, some within the academic discipline of religious studies argue that comparative theology is mistaken because it is too fideistic. They argue that Religious Studies differs from comparative theology in that it is “value-free” and independent of any faith commitment. So, whereas comparative theology, or traditional theology in any form, is viewed primarily in confessional terms, “religious studies” is seen as a detached, scientific discipline concerned with describing and analyzing religious phenomena without any existential commitment to them. The very term “religious studies” rather than “comparative religion” is often preferred for this reason: the latter is considered to be too value-laden and judgmental. On this understanding, theology in any form is a discipline suitable particularly for those training for ministry within churches, whereas religious studies is a discipline more suitable for those training to be teachers in a non-confessional setting. Or, to express this differently, theology aims to promote and refine faith whereas religious studies seeks rather to promote greater knowledge and discernment about religious issues. Theology is thus a fideistic discipline suitable for ministers, whereas religious studies is a detached discipline suitable for diplomats or civil servants.

It is not too difficult to show that both of these criticisms hardly match the disciplines of theology and religious studies as they are now typically taught and studied in Western academies. In their different ways they present caricatures of both theology and religious studies.

In the light of the understanding of systematic theology already outlined it is difficult to maintain the sharp contrast between theology and religious studies in the second criticism. It is simply not the case that in the West academic theology is invariably a confessional discipline taught in faith to people who share that faith. Even those training for ordained ministry in many mainline denominations will be expected to study a wide variety of approaches to theology which they do not personally share. It is also misleading to imagine that all of those studying religious studies in the Western academy have no prior religious commitments and approach their subject in a detached rather than fideistic manner. On the contrary, many are likely to engage in religious studies precisely because of their existential interests and concerns. It is quite possible for those, say, with defined Christian commitments themselves to wish to relate these commitments to those within religious traditions outside Christianity. Some distinguished Jewish and Islamic scholars have chosen to study Christian theology for similar reasons. A desire to study differing religious traditions does not in itself exclude a commitment to a particular tradition. Indeed, on analogy with the study of art or music, those who study a particular subject might typically be expected to have a strong attachment to at least some aspects of that subject. Religious studies, in practice, often has a balance of faith and critical detachment very similar to theology as it is typically taught and studied today in the Western academy.

The first criticism, based upon the dogmatic claim that Christian theology is wholly incomparable, ignores the considerable body of scholarship that has been concerned to analyze the Jewish, Roman and Greek roots of Christian theology. It also ignores the family relationship of Christianity to Islam and the fact that the Koran itself contains sacred traditions about Jesus Christ. The relationship between Judaism and Christianity has received particular attention in the Western academy. In part this has been stimulated by the growing awareness that some forms of Christianity have acted historically as bearers of anti-Judaism and may even have contributed to the culture of European anti-Semitism that made possible the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust. However, it has also been stimulated by Jewish and Christian theologians reading each others' works and sometimes training and studying together. Such study reveals how much early Christianity derived from Judaism and that they still share many theological precepts today.

Some scholars have also studied the extent to which early Christianity borrowed concepts more widely from the Mediterranean world. For example, the New Testament scholar Wayne Meeks has argued at length that the Pauline virtues have much in common with contemporary Graeco-Roman virtues. Or, to take a later example, Augustine in the fourth century consciously borrowed from Cicero in his understanding of both natural law and just war theory. In turn, Aquinas was later to borrow directly from the newly rediscovered ideas of Aristotle (preserved, ironically, by Islamic scholars) in writing his own systematic theology.

None of this contradicts the distinctiveness or uniqueness of Christian theology, or specifically its central focus upon Jesus Christ, yet it does question the claim that Christian theology is wholly incomparable. On the basis of this considerable amount of modern scholarship, there do seem to be solid grounds for the claim instead that Christian faith does have a clear relationship with other forms of theistic faith outside Christianity.

But what about those forms of faith that are not theistic? Theologians again soon divide on this question. Some, like Hans Küng, argue that on global issues such as international peace or the environment there are points of contact across many different forms of religious faith – whether theistic or not – and that such issues require us urgently to recognize these. However, others remain unconvinced, arguing that attempts to supply a comprehensive definition of “religious faith” have been remarkably unsuccessful. Whatever the outcome of this debate, it is difficult to maintain convincingly that Christian faith, let alone Christian practice, is wholly incomparable. Both systematic theology and religious studies in the Western academy have a similar tension or paradox. On the one hand, those who study and teach in these areas still show considerable evidence of faith and religious practice. Yet, on the other, they also seem to value critical detachment.

### *Illustration*

The story of the ten lepers in Luke’s Gospel explicitly involves the healing of a religious “alien” (“Now he was a Samaritan”), who alone is praised by Jesus. There are interesting points of contact here with the reports of the praise Jesus gives to two other “aliens,” the Centurion (Luke 7:9, Matthew 8:10) and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28). Those who have argued against the Barthian position in religious studies have tended to use this as evidence. They have also pointed to evidence gained from a comparative study of healing/miracle stories in other religions, in both the ancient and modern worlds.

This raises a very crucial issue within comparative theology, namely, what if anything is distinctive about Jesus within the Synoptic Gospels. Specifically in relation to healing stories, there are clearly many parallels with other “healers” past and present. There is even evidence of this within Luke’s own story in the command “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” It is a feature of a number of healing stories (e.g. Mark 1:40–5) that Jewish cultic ritual is part of healing.

So what is distinctively “Christian” about the healing stories in the Synoptic Gospels? Some have argued that it is the specific link that Jesus makes between healing and the apocalyptic Kingdom of God that is most distinctive. So the next two verses after this story in Luke reinforce the point that “The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20–1). More dramatically still is the earlier saying of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel that “if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). A comparative study of such sayings in the context of healing can help to see both continuities between early Christianity and other religious traditions and points of distinctiveness.



## Faith and Church History

The changed constituency of the Western academy has also had a radical effect upon the teaching of Church history. In a mono-confessional context Church history is typically interpreted in the light of particular denominations. Anglicans pay particular attention to Anglican divines such as Hooker, Presbyterians to Knox, Methodists to Wesley, and so forth. Church history is thus focused upon those people or events considered most significant to that faith community. More polemically, this focus is sometimes portrayed as the path of “orthodoxy” to be contrasted with the errors propagated by other Christians. As a result Church history in such mono-confessional contexts constitutes an important feature of identity, reinforcing boundaries between faithful Christians and others.

Yet in a pluralist environment Church history becomes more complicated. It is not, of course, value free: particular people and events are still selected for discussion and others are not; those selected are given different amounts of time and consideration; and the perspectives of different historians inevitably shape their interpretations of the significance of these people and events. Once it is conceded that selection and interpretation are inextricably involved in any study of history, and especially in any study of Church history, then absolute detachment is no more possible (or perhaps even desirable) here than it is in religious studies. Even within the pluralist context of the Western academy today, faith, or rather a multiplicity of faiths, is still a part of Church history.

However, the multiplicity of faiths involved in Church history today does entail a greater attention than in the past to divergent branches of Christianity set in a variety of cultures. Any serious study of Church history within the modern academy pays attention not simply to Western Christianity but also to Christianity in non-Western countries. The history of Christian missions, for example, is not simply relegated to a separate discipline of mission studies, but is part of a global account of Christian history. In addition, sociological studies of new religious movements, cults and sects in both Western and non-Western countries form a part of this global account. And, within accounts of early Christianity, previously discredited movements such as that of Gnosticism are treated with a new seriousness. Christian history is depicted less as the history of the successful “orthodox” and more as a varied and pluriform family of inter-related movements arising from the New Testament.

### *Illustration*

Attention to the history of attitudes toward leprosy in Christian history has been particularly helpful. There is now widespread agreement that the term “leprosy” was applied in the ancient world to a variety of skin complaints and disfigurements, rather than just to the disease of leprosy in the modern sense. Within Leviticus, for example, the concern about leprosy is more to do with ritual pollution than with contagion (it was “soiling” rather than “catchy”). As a result of this distinction, some translations of the New Testament now prefer to substitute a reference to “skin complaints” for the term “leprosy” in stories such as that of the ten “lepers” in Luke.

Despite the Synoptic Gospel stories about Jesus healing and even touching “lepers” (Mark 1:41), a fear of leprosy remained within the medieval Church. This fear even helped to shape church buildings, with the aim of reducing contact between lepers and non-lepers. Through narrow slanted windows lepers were allowed to view the central actions of the Mass without polluting other members of the congregation.

Leprosy was also given particular attention within more recent Christian missions. Before the invention of modern drugs, the isolation and sometimes courageous care of lepers by medical missionaries was often cited by Victorians as evidence of deep Christian faith. In postcolonial studies such missionary work tends to be viewed more circumspectly. Motives other than pure Christian altruism are detected by some as underlying many “heroic” missionary endeavors.

## **Faith and Moral Theology**

Very similar changes can also be found in moral theology/Christian ethics (distinctions between “morality” and “ethics” tend to be rather contrived: in origin the first derives from Latin and the second from Greek). A changing constituency within the Western academy, allied to a shift towards hermeneutics, has radically changed the discipline. However, in this instance, the current dominance of virtue ethics presents a particularly intricate intertwining of faith, practice, and theology – an intertwining which I believe characterizes applied theology in general.

A generation ago, when university theological students were predominantly young, male ordinands, Christian ethics (if it was taught at all in Britain) was distinctly more confessional in character than it is today. Classic Anglican moral theologians of the first half of the twentieth century, such as Kenneth Kirk and Robert Mortimer (both later to become bishops), presented a mixture of ethical/theological analysis and advice on pastoral practice in their books. They could assume that their audience of ordinands shared the same faith and religious practices as themselves and were looking to be guided about how they should respond to ethical issues once they were themselves ordained. Similarly, Roman Catholic moral theologians of the time, or Church of Scotland practical theologians north of the Border, also mixed analysis and pastoral advice in their work, and simply assumed that they wrote from faith to faith within their respective communities. As a result Roman Catholic moral theologians of this period largely ignored Luther and Calvin, just as Scottish practical theologians paid little attention to Aquinas. Christian ethics at the time was predominantly confessional, both in its scope and in its approach. That is, it was written from within particular denominations, by people of particular faith traditions, to fellow believers.

Within the Western academy such an approach would be less likely to commend itself today. An approach to Christian ethics that simply bypassed one of the major traditions would usually be judged to be inadequate. Roman Catholic theologians have now entered the mainstream of the Western academy and, in the process, have ensured that the natural law tradition is taken seriously even within formerly Presbyterian or Anglican faculties. In turn, these Roman Catholic theologians have taken seriously the

biblical scholarship generated by generations of Reformed and Anglican theologians. This two-way process has ensured that Christian ethics is now more genuinely ecumenical than it typically was a generation ago. Scholars across denominations and across different faith traditions mutually read each other's works. They may still disagree with each other – ecumenical dialog does not guarantee consensus – but they are less likely than hitherto simply to ignore each other.

This shift within the academic study of Christian ethics entails changes similar to those already noted in other areas of theology: critical comparison tends to replace a mono-confessional approach; pluralism rather than consensus predominates; and a degree of academic detachment becomes evident. There is no need to rehearse these points again within this new context.

However, there is one point that is new here. A multi-confessional approach to Christian ethics soon reveals that there are incommensurable moral differences between Christians. Of course, there always were real moral differences between Christians within particular denominations. Nevertheless, as long as Christian ethics was conducted separately by denominations, each might maintain the hope that their internal moral differences could in time be resolved. The doctrine of the “consensus of the faithful” reinforced this hope. But once Christian ethics is studied in a multi-confessional and ecumenical context, then it soon becomes apparent that such differences are in reality incommensurable. For example, there is no way finally to resolve crucial differences between denominations about when full human life begins or when, if ever, it is legitimate to end human life. As a result, bioethics and just-war ethics have both faced differences between Christians, which a comparative, critical approach to Christian ethics can help us better to understand but not to resolve. More than that, such an approach has revealed that there are sometimes stronger connections on particular moral issues between Christians and their secular counterparts than there are between opposing Christians.

The current debates about stem cell research or physician-assisted suicide demonstrate this clearly. Supporters and opponents of stem cell research using embryos created by cell nuclear replacement can be found amongst both Christians and secularists. Within particular denominations it can, of course, be maintained that only one side represents “orthodoxy” from a Christian perspective. Traditionalist Roman Catholics have indeed held this view, condemning such stem cell research as contrary to natural law and to the gospel. Yet across denominations such claims to “orthodoxy” soon appear tendentious where there is no agreement about when full human life begins, or indeed whether an embryo created by cell nuclear replacement constitutes a potential human being at all.

Even physician-assisted suicide, which is rejected by most denominations, is not condemned by all theologians. The latter tend to argue that it is too readily concluded from the doctrines of creation and resurrection that physician-assisted suicide is wrong. In contrast, they maintain that a belief that there is a life beyond this life might actually encourage Christians to believe that there is no need to cling to this life. My point is not to side here with either position but merely to suggest that a critical comparative approach to Christian ethics soon reveals incommensurable differences of faith and practice between Christians on moral issues.

Given this, a shift away from ethical decision-making within academic Christian ethics and toward virtue ethics is hardly surprising. As a result of this shift, recent Christian ethics has rediscovered new links with systematic theology and, ironically, with sociology. Within virtue ethics the focus is upon virtuous character and upon those communities that nurture and shape character. We are the products less of rational, individualistic moral decisions made from one situation to another than of ways of living shaped by tradition and community. As Christians our moral lives and characters are shaped by the faith and practice of worshipping communities and the traditions that they carry over the centuries. Such an understanding of Christian ethics places it firmly within the broader context of applied or practical theology.

### *Illustration*

The story of the ten lepers in Luke's Gospel contains a number of explicit virtues. At the outset there is the plea to Jesus by the lepers themselves: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." A regular feature of healing stories in the Synoptic Gospels is either a plea for mercy, to which Jesus responds (e.g. by blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:47, Luke 18:37), or Jesus showing compassion to someone who is vulnerable (e.g. to the widow of Nairn in Luke 7:13). A number of Christian ethicists have followed Augustine in arguing that "love," or perhaps better "compassion," is at the heart of Christian ethics. There are, however, distinct differences between those ethicists who argue that love/compassion is always personalist or individualistic and those who believe that it can be communitarian and be translated into norms.

At the end of the story of the ten lepers is thanksgiving. For most commentators this is a straightforward expression of gratitude, which they see as instructive for Christian moral behavior. A belief in divine grace should encourage people to be grateful. Yet some have argued that understood within the social context of the Middle East, gratitude in the story is a form of submission and closure: the one who has been healed acknowledges Jesus as the source of the healing and concludes their relationship. Expressing gratitude is, then, the end of a relationship not the beginning of one.

### **Faith and Applied Theology**

Applied or practical theology within the Western academy is the discipline especially concerned with this interaction between faith and practice. Sometimes this relationship is envisaged as faith shaping practice, sometimes as practice shaping faith, and sometimes as an interaction of the two. Applied theology within the modern academy has a similar comparative, critical role to that of systematic theology as well as having clear links to secular disciplines such as sociology. A discipline that was once considered to be an appendix to systematic and biblical theology within the academy has now become a central player in understanding the tension or, perhaps better, interaction between faith and practice evident in all of the other areas of theology. It is also a discipline that has made considerable use of the social sciences to understand this interaction more fully.

Applied theology a generation ago often consisted of little more than practical advice to ordinands. A teacher with considerable experience of ordained ministry would teach young ordinands how they should conduct funeral services, how they should preach, how they should conduct pastoral visiting, or similar related tasks. Having studied biblical and systematic theology in the academy, the applied or practical theologian was the person responsible for teaching ordinands the practicalities of ordained ministry. In the Church of Scotland applied theologians typically taught within a university, but often had been university chaplains or highly regarded parish ministers first. In the Church of England “pastoral theology” (as it was usually termed) was more typically taught within a seminary, albeit by priests with pastoral experience similar to that of their counterparts in Scotland.

However well intended this model of applied theology, it faced serious difficulties. The parish experience of those teaching applied theology for any length of time, whether in the university or in a seminary, inevitably became more distant. So, just as trainee teachers frequently resent being told how to teach children by those who no longer teach them themselves, ordinands were often suspicious of the advice they were being given by former parish ministers, however experienced they had once been. Again, models of professional formation from disciplines such as medicine, suggested that the proper place for practical training was not in an academy but in the context of the job itself. Critical placements alongside reflexive practitioners were more likely to generate good professional formation.

Once the profile of those studying theology within the academy also changed it was soon clear that this “hints and tips for ordinands” approach to applied theology was no longer appropriate. The pluralism of present-day students within the Western academy, noted already in all other areas of theology, has also had a radical impact upon academic applied theology. The discipline still maintained a central focus upon faith and practice, but it could no longer assume any shared faith or practice among theological students. The relationship between divergent, and sometimes conflicting, patterns of Christian faith and practice now became the primary subject matter of applied theology within the academy.

The concept of “praxis” is sometimes used within applied theology to denote this new understanding. Initially taken from Marxist studies, it suggests that behavior is given priority over theory, but that there remains a two-way process between the two. In a more traditional understanding of religious practice it was often assumed that faith takes priority over practice. Christian faith thus sets the template for Christian practice. Within theological studies it was frequently assumed that the primary task of theology was to establish an adequate faith based upon a careful study of the Bible and Christian tradition. Once that had been achieved then issues of practice could be addressed. In a similar way it was often assumed in philosophy that the primary task was to produce clarity of thought and theory before any practical problems could be adequately addressed. Marxist studies reversed this understanding, arguing that what people actually do and how they behave should be the starting point of analysis. On this approach, practice is given priority and theory is, in the first place, the attempt to understand practice. Once theory is adequately grounded in an analysis of present-day practice then it too can shape future practice.

By no means all applied theologians give explicit credence to Marxism (although some liberation theologians certainly do), but they do typically work from this approach based upon praxis. In the relationship between faith and practice they give far more attention to practice than most other theologians do. Those working within applied liturgical studies often argue that it is worship that shapes doctrine and in turn is shaped by doctrine. Those working within Christian ethics argue that it is Christian communities that mold Christian character, which, in turn, shapes the ethical decision-making of individuals. Those working within Christian education argue that Christian formation within families, churches and, perhaps, within schools, is crucial for nurturing faith, and that this faith, once nurtured, should then inform Christian formation. In each of these areas within applied theology there is a priority given to practice, as well as an awareness of a continuing interaction between practice and faith. And in each of these areas the social sciences assume an important role.

Naturally an extensive use of social sciences within any area of theology is likely to generate suspicions of relativism and reductionism. A suspicion of relativism is raised here, as it is in other areas of theology, by the increasing pluralism of those teaching and studying applied theology. And a suspicion of reductionism is generated by the fear that extensive use of social sciences will soon eliminate transcendence altogether. Churches and church practices will soon, so it is feared, be reduced to the purely secular. For example, a use of organizational or business theory to understand churches will simply reduce them to nothing more than secular organizations or (worse still) businesses.

This is surely a profound misunderstanding of both applied theology and the social sciences. To explain or understand churches or religious practice in social-scientific terms is not in itself to explain them away. There manifestly are, for example, financial and economic features of institutional churches: they have budgets, they raise income and they spend money. All of these features can be compared with the similar activities of secular organizations and, if they are to be achieved effectively and efficiently, might benefit from such comparison. But to assume from this that institutional churches are “nothing but” financial/economic institutions would be an obvious exaggeration. Similarly, church leadership does have points in common with other forms of secular leadership. Yet studying it in this way does not of itself imply that it is *only* to be understood in this way. A judicious use of social science within applied theology is perfectly compatible with a commitment to transcendence.

At the heart of applied theology, then, is a concern for faith, practice, and theology. Even if the relationship between these three has become more complex and varied within the Western academy today, a concern to study and better to understand their relationship remains.

### *Illustration*

The story of the ten lepers in Luke’s Gospel makes important links between faith and practice that have wider implications for society at large. The explicit connection between the final “your faith has made you well” and the healing has already been noted (albeit with some ambiguity). However, there is also an implicit connection with

a notion of “care” that has been highly influential within the caring professions. Within this healing story, as in many other, an initial plea for “mercy” is met with an immediate response from Jesus. Compassion or love is typically accompanied by action and even by a call to “show yourselves to the priest.” This closely fits the claim of liberation theology that praxis is crucial.

Again, applied theologians are likely to see an implicit concern for the vulnerable and oppressed within this story. A strong feature of the early healing stories in Mark’s Gospel is that they involve Jesus deliberately flouting traditional Jewish attitudes toward impurity and Sabbath-keeping in order to heal those who are sick. Applied theologians themselves soon divide, though, on whether they see such healing in terms primarily of challenging and changing social conventions or whether they see it rather in terms of personal and individual acts.

Finally there is a deep and ongoing division among different Christian communities about the implications of the Synoptic healing stories for health care today. The most radical position is taken by groups such as Christian Scientists and some conservative evangelical groups who argue for “covenanted healing” – according to which God has covenanted to heal all those who are prayed for in faith. Taken literally such theological positions make conventional modern medicine (even for diseases such as leprosy in its modern sense) irrelevant or even sinful. In contrast, other Christians effectively believe with Luther that “the day of miracles is past” and that all disease should be treated by modern medicine alone. Between these two positions are some who argue that religious faith can still be relevant (even complementary) to modern medicine. They might even cite leprosy in the ancient sense – often involving psychosomatic skin complaints and a strong sense of pollution – as an obvious example.

## Bibliography

- Barton, J. ed. 2001. *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ford, D. and Hardy, D. eds. 1989. *The Modern Theologians*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Gill, R. ed. 1995. *Readings in Modern Theology*. London: SPCK.
- Gill, R. ed. 2001. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gunton, C. ed. 1997. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hodgson, P. and King, R. eds. 1985. *Readings in Christian Theology*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press; London: SPCK.
- Loades, A. ed. 1990. *Feminist Theology*. London: SPCK.
- McGrath, A. E. ed. 1995. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rowland, C. ed. 2001. *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woodward, J. and Pattison, S. eds. 2000. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

## CHAPTER 2

# Biblical Studies

John Barton

### **The Bible and the Critics**

In the years after World War II there was a widespread consensus about the Bible. Methods of scholarly study were generally agreed, and for both Old and New Testaments there were models of the text's historical development and religious importance that provided a groundplan all students needed to learn and appropriate. Biblical studies had been an ecumenical success story, too, giving the Protestant churches many insights on which all could agree. They also facilitated dialogue with the Catholic Church, whose scholars had been allowed by Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of 1943 to engage in critical biblical study alongside their Protestant colleagues. The Second Vatican Council also gave a massive impetus to critical study of the Bible.

In the last twenty years or so there has been a major shift in biblical studies. Consensus even about method has broken down, and the field is now a battleground of conflicting approaches, with no agreed conclusions any longer. This can be exhilarating, but it can give the observer a sense of disorientation. Against the background of "post-modernism" there is now a feeling that anything goes in the study of the Bible.

This can intensify a popular feeling among believing Christians and Jews that biblical scholars are the enemies of faith. In fact, most biblical scholars the world over are religious believers themselves, though not always of a very orthodox kind. Nearly all are Christians, but in recent years biblical study has also been practiced more among Jewish scholars. Traditionally, study of Scripture in Judaism followed well-worn paths of rabbinic exegesis, and did not engage with "critical" issues, but this is changing today. Only in very recent years have agnostics and even atheists come to take an interest in the Bible, partly because of the turn to "literary" and sociological interpretations which will be discussed below. But a religious motivation for biblical study is still the predominant one. This does not mean, however, that the conclusions to which biblical scholars come are always religiously very palatable.