

dans le cadre d'un ensemble de croyances, et que, si Dieu est le créateur de tout être, toute quête de la connaissance doit trouver son point de départ en lui. Newbigin montre ensuite comment l'autorité de Dieu nous atteint de façon médiate et comment nous devons lui rendre témoignage.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dies Büchlein will der Gemeinde helfen, ihre missionarische Verantwortung in der Spätmoderne zu verstehen und auszuüben. Newbigin argumentiert, dass jede Wahrheitssuche im Rahmen von Glaubensvoraussetzungen geschieht, und dass, wenn Gott der Urheber allen Seins ist, jeder Erkenntnisanspruch Ihn als Ausgangspunkt nehmen muss. Der Autor zeigt, wie Gottes Autorität vermittelt wird und wie wir Zeugnis für sie geben sollen.

Since his return to Britain from a long ministry as a missionary in India, Leslie Newbigin has explored in several publications the missionary challenge presented to the church by Western culture. It is therefore fitting that he should contribute to the "Christian Mission and Modern Culture" series which aims at helping the church understand its missionary responsibility to a culture in crisis. This booklet gives him the opportunity to summarise much of what is at the heart of his thinking on Christian mission and modern culture. The first chapter highlights that the authority of the creator cannot be demonstrated independently of God's own self-revelation, since it is personal and final authority. Therefore, the first issue to be addressed must be modernity's rejection of authority. Newbigin retrieves the pre-modern and post-modern insight that all knowledge is based on faith. People gain new insights and are able to doubt rationally only within a framework of beliefs. If God is really the author of all being, all claims to knowledge must start with him. 'The search for an authority prior to and more basic than the authority of God's self-revelation must end in failure.' (9f). But how is this authority mediated to us? This is the question dealt with in the second chapter.

Beginning with observations of what Jesus did to mediate his authority, Newbigin finds three elements: 'a living community, a tradition of teaching, and the continuing work of the divine Spirit illuminating the tradition in each new generation' (31). He then turns to the contemporary debate among Christians on the authority of Scripture, of the church and its tradition, of reason, and of experience.

Newbigin attempts to deliver us from false alternatives by setting the different elements in proper relation to one another.

The final chapter summarises the argument under the heading "Witnessing to divine authority in the context of modernity". It challenges us to acknowledge the personal element in all knowledge (and especially in knowledge of God) and to commend the authority of the Gospel not by asserting a set of eternal and undubitable truths (in line with modernist thinking), but by telling and living the story which we believe and whose author is God.

Thus, this book not only challenges some basic assumptions of the culture in which the church is operating, but it also challenges the church to let its model of truth and authority be shaped by Scripture rather than by modernist assumptions. As a tight summary of Newbigin's writings on the witness of the church in our sceptical age, this volume is especially suitable for those with little time to read. Yet even those who want to explore in some depth the important issue of 'truth and authority in modernity', could do much worse than start with this profound little book.

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EuroJTh (1997) 6:2, 172-174

0960-2720

Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study

John Barton

London: Darton, Longman and Todd,
1996 (2nd ed.), xvii + 294 pp., £15.95, pb.
ISBN 0-232-52201-4

RÉSUMÉ

Voici la seconde édition, revue et augmentée, de l'ouvrage paru en 1984, Lire l'Ancien Testament. Il présente toute la gamme des approches de l'interprétation de l'Ancien Testament, depuis les méthodes 'traditionnelles' de la critique littéraire, formiste et rédactionnelle, en passant par l'approche canonique de B.S. Childs, le structuralisme et la 'nouvelle critique', jusqu'à la critique rhétorique, la poétique biblique, l'esthétique de réception et les développements post-structuralistes comme la déconstruction. Il met en valeur les points forts et les limites de chaque méthode et défend habilement la thèse qu'il n'existe pas de méthode correcte pour éclairer le sens du texte.

De plus, il montre à quel point il est important de déterminer le genre du texte pour bien le comprendre. Même si l'on n'est pas d'accord avec tous les arguments de Barton, on doit reconnaître que l'ouvrage se recommande par son équilibre et sa clarté.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die zweite, erweiterte Auflage von Bartons ursprünglich 1984 erschienenem Buch *Reading the Old Testament* behandelt nun das gesamte Spektrum literarischer Methoden zur Interpretation des Alten Testaments, das von den 'traditionellen' Ansätzen der Literar-, Form- und Redaktionskritik über B. S. Childs' canonical approach, den Strukturalismus und den sogenannten New Criticism bis hin zur Rhetorischen Kritik, der Biblischen Poetik, der Rezeptionsästhetik sowie poststrukturalistischen Entwicklungen wie der Dekonstruktion reicht. Barton versteht es, die Stärken wie die Grenzen der einzelnen Ansätze aufzuzeigen und argumentiert im übrigen überzeugend, daß es die korrekte Methode, welche die Bedeutung des Textes erhellen würde, nicht gibt. Darüber hinaus zeigt er auf, wie wichtig die Gattungsbestimmung für das Verständnis eines Textes ist. Selbst wenn man Bartons Urteil nicht in allen Fällen zustimmen wird, so verdient das Buch doch aufgrund seiner Ausgewogenheit und Anschaulichkeit eine klare Empfehlung.

When the first edition of Barton's *Reading the Old Testament* appeared in 1984, it was received as a ground-breaking and much needed work. In it Barton surveys the various literary methods employed in Old Testament study in order to illustrate which interpretive questions each of them is able to answer and which not.

Barton develops his argument on the basis of the structuralist concept of 'literary competence and genre recognition'. Hence he affirms that the interpreter needs to address the question of what sort of text he is dealing with since 'reading a text depends crucially on decisions about genre, about what a text is to be read as' (pp. 5-6).

Three chapters assess the contributions of literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism to the task of Old Testament interpretation. Here, as in the remainder of his study, the strength of Barton's discussion lies in his penetration into the strengths and weaknesses of the respective methods. He uncovers their underlying assumptions and

demonstrates their achievements as well as intrinsic limitations.

Turning to 'recent' developments, B. S. Childs' canonical approach is discussed as are structuralist criticism and the so-called New Criticism. Of all the methods assessed, the canonical approach meets with the most poignant critique. Barton—not accepting Childs' contention that his enterprise is basically a theological one—traces close links between the canonical approach and the New Criticism and claims that those two stand or fall together implying, of course, the latter. Structuralism, on the other hand, is welcomed as offering some important concepts and correctives to the biblical scholar although its 'ideological commitment and illusions of grandeur' (p. 190), i.e., its exclusivistic claims are rejected.

Due to important developments during the last twelve years, two new chapters have been added in this second edition. Chapter 13, 'The Reader in the Text', focuses on rhetorical criticism, biblical poetics, and reader-response criticism (reception-aesthetics), while post-structuralist developments such as deconstruction and postmodernist attitudes towards texts in general are treated in the following chapter. Barton affirms the value of those approaches that attempt to uncover how (rather than what) texts mean (i.e., the methods discussed in ch. 13), but he vehemently rejects postmodernist relativism—as displayed in deconstruction, for instance—as absurd.

Throughout Barton argues a strong case against the idea of a 'correct' method, which, if only applied properly, would enable the interpreter to discover once and for all the true meaning of the text. 'Biblical "methods" are theories rather than methods'. A theory, Barton adds, 'may lead to useful insights [] but it can never be a technique which can always be used with the assurance that it will yield correct results' (p. 244).

This judicious perspective alone deserves a wide readership. The book is also recommended for the emphasis it lays on 'the recognition of genre' as a fundamental hermeneutical task. It does not provide detailed instructions as to how the methods are to be practised, nor is it a sophisticated critique of their underlying philosophical assumptions. But it does facilitate orientation in the increasingly complex labyrinth of 'methods'—or rather 'theories'—and it is brilliantly written. Especially the many vivid illustrations help the reader understand the often

complex and sometimes puzzling hermeneutical concepts.

One will certainly disagree with Barton at times since his perspective—despite his cautious and well-balanced argument—is necessarily shaped by his own agenda, i.e., his preference for a moderate *redaction criticism*. This becomes evident, for example, in his critique of rhetorical critics who ‘can nearly always “demonstrate” a rhetorical structure in any given text and so invalidate historical-critical arguments based on its apparent (or evident) formlessness’ (p. 201). While this is true in principle, the problem remains whether the texts in question are correctly described as formless or not. And although the answer will have to be given on an individual basis, Barton’s statement shows that the results we get are always determined by the questions we ask. It is therefore problematic to label the drive behind rhetorical criticism an apologetic one (p. 204), as it would be mistaken to condemn the historical-critical enterprise as simply destructive.

But these quarrels are not intended to lessen Barton’s achievements, which make his book—even if one does not agree with everything Barton says—an important contribution to the issue of Old Testament interpretation.

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EuroJTh (1997) 6:2, 174–175

0960–2720

The Spirit and the Letter: Studies in the Biblical Canon

J. Barton

London: SPCK, 1997, 210pp., £17.50, pb, ISBN 0 281 05011 2

RÉSUMÉ

L'Esprit et la Lettre est le second ouvrage de Barton sur le canon biblique. Son premier ouvrage, Les Oracles de Dieu, traitait du canon juif de l'Ancien Testament et était très peu satisfaisant. Celui-ci traite du canon chrétien des deux Testaments; il est beaucoup plus positif et utile. Tout en reprenant des éléments de l'ouvrage précédant, il adopte une approche différente. Il insiste sur la fréquence des citations chez les Pères de l'église et sur les listes de livres bibliques. Sa conception selon laquelle la fréquence des citations serait plus importante que le statut scripturaire et que les listes de livres relèveraient d'une tendance tardive est intenable.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

The Spirit and the Letter ist Bartons zweites Buch zum biblischen Kanon. Sein früheres Werk Oracles of God behandelte den jüdischen Kanon des Alten Testaments und war ausgesprochen unbefriedigend. Das vorliegende Werk thematisiert den christlichen Kanon beider Testamente und ist wesentlich positiver und hilfreicher. Obwohl es an einzelnen Punkten auf dem früheren Buch aufbaut, ist es doch prinzipiell grundverschieden. Besondere Beachtung wird der Häufigkeit, mit der die biblischen Bücher von den Kirchenvätern verwendet wurden, sowie den Verzeichnissen der Bücher gewidmet. Doch Bartons Behauptungen, daß die Häufigkeit der Benutzung von größerer Bedeutung sei als ihr Status als Heilige Schriften, und daß die Verzeichnisse eine späte Entwicklung darstellten, sind nicht aufrechtzuerhalten.

John Barton is a writer who thinks adventurous thoughts about the canon. In *Oracles of God* (1986), dealing with the Jewish canon of the Old Testament, they were very wild thoughts indeed, and were capable of being comprehensively disproved (see ‘A Modern Theory of the Old Testament Canon,’ in *Vetus Testamentum* XLI:4, 1991). In the present work, dealing with the Christian canon of the Bible, and in particular of the New Testament, his thoughts are more disciplined. Based on his Hulsean lectures, to which he had clearly devoted a great deal of study, his approach remains challenging but makes a real contribution to understanding, whether or not his conclusions can be accepted as they stand.

Barton’s attitude to the New Testament is, on the whole, very positive. He recognises that the books were written early, and that most of them were early accepted as authoritative. He holds that they should be treated as self-consistent. Building on the work of Franz Stuhlhofer, he points out that the early Fathers use them more, proportionately, than they use the Old Testament. From this he makes the bold deduction that they were really more authoritative for the Fathers than the Old Testament was, though the Old Testament was reckoned as Holy Scripture, and the New Testament at first was not. He goes on to make the further bold deduction that the idea of Holy Scripture is merely theoretical, and that what really matters is how much a book is used. A more sober deduction would be that scriptural status and frequency of use are both significant, though in different ways, the former