

that stood out most as one definitely worth a revisit.

Thiselton's essay 'Communicative Action and Promise in Interdisciplinary, Biblical, and Theological Hermeneutics' is, as one would expect, an amazingly rich and insightful piece boasting massive breadth of knowledge. It draws the previous two essays together by focusing on the key issue behind the book: how to chart a new path in hermeneutics between the Scylla of Cartesian, mechanical repetition and the Charybdis of radical, unconstrained textual indeterminacy. Thiselton argues that texts set limits within which right interpretations (plural) can continue to arise. Texts encourage active reader participation and biblical texts fall all along the spectrum of polyvalence between closed to open. Although reader-response criticism has brought gains it was reactionary and, in its radical Fishian version, is misleading. Humans and hermeneutics are thoroughly temporal so, inspired by the work of Robert Jauss, Thiselton calls for a rediscovery of the importance of the history of interpretation of biblical texts, which mediates between those texts and us. Fresh insights occur *within* reading traditions. The climax of the chapter is the application of speech act theory to understanding the central biblical notion of 'promise'.

It is impossible to give a clear impression of any of these deep and provocative essays in the space allocated. All unite in pointing to a way forward through the current hermeneutical confusion and all would repay second and third readings. It is a demanding read (especially Thiselton whose essay was also, if anything, over long) best suited to postgraduates or dedicated undergraduates.

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EuroJTh (2000) 9:2, 203–204

0960-2720

***Reading for Good: Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the Perspective of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics***

**Theo L. Hettema**

Studies in Philosophical Theology 18.

Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996, 380 pp., no price, pb., ISBN 90-390-0252-5

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Das Buch bietet im ersten Teil eine Darstellung der hermeneutischen Theorie Ricoeurs, und im zweiten eine Interpretation der Josephsgeschichte in Genesis 37–50, die als narrative Einheit gelesen wird. Nach der guten Darstellung der Theorie ist der zweite Teil enttäuschend, da er sich weder mit neueren literarischen Ansätzen (Alter, Sternberg), noch mit theologischen Interpretationen (von Rad, Clines) ausführlich auseinandersetzt, und Diskursanalyse als irrelevant abtut. Positiv ist nur die Herausstellung einzelner ethischer Themen (z. B. Vorsehung, Versöhnung), die größere exegetische Beachtung verdienen.*

**RÉSUMÉ**

*Dans sa première partie, l'auteur présente la théorie herméneutique de Paul Ricoeur, et propose ensuite une interprétation de l'histoire de Joseph (Gn. 37–50) lue comme une unité narrative. L'exposé théorique est bon, la seconde partie décevante: elle ne prend en compte ni la théorie littéraire moderne (Alter, Sternberg), ni les interprétations théologiques (von Rad, Clines), et laisse de côté l'analyse de discours. Le point positif est la mise en évidence de thèmes éthiques particuliers (la providence, la réconciliation).*

The first part of this book is devoted to an exposition of Ricoeur's theory of hermeneutics, particularly his concepts of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration—that is, the stages between the conceptualisation of a narrative in an author's mind and its reinterpretation by the reader.

The second part of the book is devoted to an interpretation of the Joseph narrative. Hettema takes the whole of Genesis 37–50 as a coherent unit, which could lead to a fresh and positive reading of the book. But in fact this section is disappointing. Though he is aware of the work of the newer literary critics such as Alter and Sternberg, there is very little interaction with them. Discourse analysis is dismissed as irrelevant, and those who have tried to deal with the theology of the Pentateuch, such as von Rad and Clines, are virtually ignored. The result is a pathetically inadequate discussion of the Joseph story as a whole and Genesis 38 in particular.

It must be said that Hettema does raise issues about the ethics of the biblical story of Joseph that ought to have a much higher profile in exegesis, e.g. the concept of providence in this text and its definition of reconciliation.

He also makes some useful observations about how we perceive these ideas in the text and how we apply them in our situation. So though this book may be a splendid example of theorising about hermeneutics, it is a disappointing example of hermeneutical practice.

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EuroJTh (2000) 9:2, 204

0960-2720

***The Biblical Flood: A Case Study of the Church's Response to Extrabiblical Evidence***

**Davis A. Young**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995, xiii + 327 pp., £14.99, pb., ISBN 0-8028-0719-4 (Eerdmans); 0-85364-678-3 (Paternoster)

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Das Buch bringt einen hervorragenden Überblick über die Beziehungen zwischen biblischer Exegese und naturwissenschaftlichen Entdeckungen von neutestamentlicher Zeit bis heute. Relativ viel Platz wird der Darstellung und Widerlegung exzentrischer konservativer Erklärungen der Flut gewidmet. Young selbst sieht eine lokale mesopotamische Flut (als berechtigtes Paradigma universalen Gerichts) im Hintergrund des biblischen Berichtes.*

**RÉSUMÉ**

*Le livre donne un excellent aperçu de la relation entre l'exégèse biblique et les découvertes scientifiques depuis le temps du Nouveau Testament jusqu'à nos jours. L'auteur consacre une large place à l'exposé et à la critique des explications conservatrices plutôt excentriques du déluge. Il considère pour sa part que le récit biblique du déluge a pour arrière-plan un événement local, qui s'est produit en Mésopotamie, et qui fonctionne comme un paradigme du jugement universel.*

Belief in a universal flood was part of standard Christian belief until the nineteenth century. Indeed, in the early days of geology fossils and sedimentary layers were often ascribed to Noah's flood. But as geological knowledge grew, traditional views of the flood became less and less credible.

Young in this book gives a magnificent survey of the interaction of biblical exegesis and scientific discovery from New Testament times to the present. It is salutary to realise how many older interpretations have rested on ephemeral scientific theory and how more recent evangelical studies have often ignored well established geological facts.

European readers may be surprised at the amount of space devoted to eccentric American conservative Christian explanations of the flood and geological discovery, but clearly these ideas have much more currency on the other side of the Atlantic. Young is concerned to confute such views. Those who have never taken them seriously may be tempted to ignore this book, but Young's concern to integrate geological discovery with the testimony of Scripture is an important one for Christian apologetics. He believes that a Mesopotamian local flood lies behind the biblical story, but that the Bible is right to affirm this as a paradigm of universal judgement. He is also right to hint that Christians should stop being defensive about the relations between science and faith. The age, size and complexity of the universe witness to a Creator of unimaginable wisdom and power.

I should also have liked him to have gone further and discussed the *Tendenz* of Genesis in its use of Mesopotamian tradition. Its monotheistic theology, the place it assigns mankind in the divine purpose, and its scepticism about human progress give the theology of Genesis a strikingly original thrust that still resonates today.

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EuroJTh (2000) 9:2, 204-206

0960-2720

***The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ***

**Mark Allan Powell**

Oxford: Lion, 1999, 238 pp., £16.99, hb., ISBN 0-7459-4209-1

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Powells Buch besteht aus einer Darstellung und Wertung von sechs wichtigen Beiträgen zur wissenschaftlichen Suche nach dem historischen Jesus. Besprochen werden die Arbeiten des Jesus Seminars, J.D. Crossans,*