

for anyone wishing to interact with the new perspective or the views of James Dunn.

Preston Sprinkle, Aberdeen, Scotland

***The Old is Better*
*New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretation***

Robert H. Gundry

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SUMMARY

In this collection of twenty essays Robert Gundry presents able and interesting defences of traditional interpretations in NT theology and of New Testament texts (Gospels, Paul, Revelation). These traditional interpretations range from those in the NT itself through those in the early post-apostolic church to some that have become traditional in modern study of the NT. Three essays were not published previously, the others were at times heavily revised or were supplemented by addenda. Throughout Gundry argues his cases carefully and in a well informed manner. Altogether a stimulating volume that shows, that which is new and at times has become accepted need not necessarily be right. Rather, it should be carefully assessed and accepted only if it is more faithful to the NT text and historically more plausible than traditional interpretations.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In dieser Sammlung von 20 Essays präsentiert Robert Gundry kompetente und interessante Verteidigungen traditioneller Interpretationen im Bereich NT-Theologie und von NT-Texten (Evangelien, Paulus, Offenbarung). Diese traditionellen Interpretationen reichen von solchen innerhalb des NT selbst über Interpretationen aus der frühen apostolischen Kirche bis zu einigen, die in der modernen neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft zu traditionellen Interpretationen geworden sind. Drei Essays waren bisher unveröffentlicht, die anderen sind zwischenzeitlich stark überholt oder durch Zusätze ergänzt worden. Gundry argumentiert seine Anliegen durchweg sorgfältig und auf eine gut informierte Weise. Insgesamt ein stimulierender Band, der zeigt, dass das, was neu und zum Teil akzeptiert ist, nicht notwendigerweise richtig sein muss, sondern sorgfältig bewertet und nur dann akzeptiert werden sollte, wenn es in größerer Treue zum NT-Text steht und größere historische Plausibilität besitzt als traditionelle Interpretationen.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ces vingt essais, Robert Gundry se fait avec compétence l'avocat d'interprétations traditionnelles de textes du Nouveau Testament (les évangiles, les épîtres de Paul et l'Apocalypse) ainsi que d'éléments de la théologie du Nouveau Testament. Certaines de ces interprétations se trouvent dans le Nouveau Testament lui-même, d'autres

sont celles de l'Église post-apostolique ancienne et d'autres sont devenues traditionnelles dans l'étude moderne du Nouveau Testament. Trois de ces essais sont nouveaux et les autres ont été largement révisés ou complétés. Gundry argumente toujours de manière soignée et se montre bien informé. Ce livre est stimulant et montre que les nouveautés qui reçoivent parfois un large accueil favorable ne sont pas nécessairement justes. On ne devrait plutôt accepter une nouveauté que s'il s'avère, après un examen sérieux, qu'elle est plus fidèle au texte du Nouveau Testament et plus plausible que l'interprétation traditionnelle qui en a été donnée dans l'histoire.

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Robert Gundry taught for many years at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California, and is probably most widely known for his extensive commentaries on the gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) and of Mark (*Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). In the present volume he presents essays on the Gospels, Paul, the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. Gundry writes in the introduction (vii-xiii) on what these essays have in common: "... they all share, more or less, the characteristic of defending traditional interpretations, usually over against new ones. Hence the subtitle, *New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*. These interpretations range from those in the NT itself through those in the early postapostolic church to some that have become traditional in modern study of the NT. The main title echoes the saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 5:39: 'No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, *The old is better*'" (vii). Gundry continues: "It may be thought that I support traditional interpretations because of my social location within the historic Christian faith. Well and good, but I maintain this social location because I hold that faith to be true – universally true, not just true for the confessing community to which I belong". Gundry wants his readers to judge these essays "...not on the prejudicial ground of their social locations versus mine but on the ground of their perceived faithfulness to the NT text" (vii).

The collection includes the following articles: "Hermeneutic Liberty, Theological Diversity, and Historical Occasionalism in the Biblical Canon" (1-17) in which Gundry "pays homage to the Bible as a collection of documents written in and for different occasions and argues for the importance of suiting our current interpretations of the Bible to its resultant, original diversity rather than choosing a new, sleeker canon-within-the-canon or over-systematizing biblical theology at the expense of distinctive emphases found in the various parts of Scripture" (vii); "The Symbiosis of Theology and Genre Criticism of the Canonical Gospels" (18-48, which includes two addenda: "The Gospels as Encomia?" and an assessment of the reconstruction of Jesus by N. T. Wright, concerning which Gundry writes: "Despite the importance of the historical Jesus, moreover, the traditional Jesuses

of the Gospels are theologically more important than a modernly reconstructed historical Jesus" viii); In "The Apostolically Johannine Pre-Papian Tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew" (49-73), Gundry argues "that Papias wrote ca. A. D. 110 or slightly earlier, that the elder whom Papias quotes is none other than the Apostle John, and that therefore we should accept the traditional ascriptions of Mark to John Mark and of Matthew to the Apostle Matthew and likewise accept the Petrine origin of the materials that John Mark wrote down" (viii).

Further essays are "On The Secret Gospel of Mark" (74-97, Gundry puts the canonical Mark at the start of a timeline leading to the Secret Gospel of Mark); "Jesus' Blasphemy according to Mark 14:61b-64 and Mishnah Sanhedrin 7:5" (98-110, harmonizing "Mark's account of Jesus' Sanhedric trial with the Mishnaic rule that capital blasphemy must include a pronouncement of the tetragrammaton ... the Markan and Mishnaic traditions can stand together as equally accurate and equally early", viii); "Matthew: Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish? At an Intersection of Sociology and Theology" (111-19, Gundry ably defends the traditional view that Matthew's Gospel represents a Jewish Christianity that has broken away from Judaism over against the suggestion that Matthew represents a Christian sect within Judaism); "Salvation in Matthew" (120-28, Matthew's soteriology is a response to non Christian Jews' persecution of Jewish Christians that had broken away from Judaism and were therefore considered apostate); "The Sermon on the Mount according to H. D. Betz" (129-48, a detailed critique of Betz' Hermeneia commentary on Matt 5-7; Gundry argues that redaction by Matthew himself is responsible for the present shape of the sermon); "Spinning the Lilies and Unraveling the Ravens: An Alternative Reading of Q 12:22b-31 and P. Oxy. 655" (149-70, exegesis of both passages and the case that Luke's and Matthew's version are earlier than that in the Gospel of Thomas). In "The Essential Physicality of Jesus' Resurrection according to the New Testament" (171-194, including the addendum: "A Biblical and Philosophical-Scientific Conversation with Christian Nonreductive Physicalists") Gundry rejects "modern attempts to dematerialize the resurrection or to make it a passing accommodation to the need of the eyewitnesses to see Jesus. Notwithstanding glorification... the NT consistently teaches that the body of Jesus that suffered death by crucifixion was raised from the dead so as to empty his tomb, that this body belongs to his very being, and that the mention in the traditional creeds of the 'resurrection of the flesh' corresponds to this NT teaching" (ix).

In his essay "The Inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul" (195-224), originally published in *Biblica* 66, 1985, 1-38 (one of the earliest detailed critical assessments of Sanders' proposals, still worth careful study twenty years onwards!), Gundry offers a trenchant critique of the so called new perspective and concludes: "All in all, then, hurrah for the Old Perspective on Paul! Its

superiority over the New Perspective consists in a denial of synergism in favor of staying in as well as getting in by faith alone, and in a stress on the justified sinner's relation to God as foundational for social relations in the church. Whether or not written by Paul, Eph 2:8-10 summarizes this soteriology admirably well" (224). Paul taught "staying in the new covenant by faith alone as well as getting in by faith alone, that in this respect he differed from Jewish soteriology, according to which... staying in depends not purely on works but on a mixture of works and faith, and that for Paul good works give evidence of salvation rather than contributing to it even in part" (x).

On this basis Grundy turns to Pauline theology and exegesis. The essays cover "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness" (225-251, resurrecting "a version of the Protestant doctrine of justification older than the one that includes an imputation of Christ's righteousness to believing sinners", x); "The Moral Frustration of Paul before His Conversion: Sexual Lusts in Romans 7:7-25" (252-71, the passage describes the moral frustration of a non-Christian, Paul is describing his own, though typical, experience of coming to sexual maturity and adult responsibility in Judaism; is the traditional Protestant interpretation prior to W. G. Kümmel's study not that Paul is describing the experience of Christians?); "Style and Substance in Philippians 2:6-11" (272-91, including addenda "Assonance and Euphony in Philippians 2:6-11" and "Self-Emptying as Death, Not Incarnation", an interesting interpretation of the passage, "in terms of an emphasis on Jesus' crucifixion as a contrast to his exaltation than in terms of an emphasis in the incarnation as such a contrast", x); "The Hellenization of Dominical Tradition and Christianization of Jewish Tradition in the Eschatology of 1-2 Thessalonians" (292-314, a defence to the traditional understanding of Jesus' return as a descent all the way to earth rather than various theories of "rapture", i.e. Jesus descending only part of the way, turning around in midair and taking Christians back to heaven with him).

Next Gundry takes up Johannine Literature: "Is John's Gospel Sectarian?" (315-23, a defence of the sectarian nature, "in the sense most commonly accepted by modern sociologists", x); "How the Word in John's Prologue Pervades the Rest of the Fourth Gospel" (324-62, including addenda "The Transfiguration of Jesus according to John: Jesus as the Heard Word" and "In Defense of 'Exegesis' in John 1:18", arguing for a Johannine Word-Christology not only in the prologue but throughout the Gospel); "The Sense and Syntax of John 3:14-17" (363-76); "Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation" (377-98, including a "Rejoinder to P. R. Carrell and A. Yarbro Collins", Gundry argues for an angelomorphic Christology throughout Revelation, most clearly in chapter 10; this christology represents "an early christological tradition rather than a Christology that blossomed not till later than the NT", xi). In "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for

People" (399-411, including an addendum on "Abiding in the Temple of the New Jerusalem") Gundry suggests that the city stands for its inhabitants rather than as their place of residents, just as the OT often uses place-names for people rather than for geographical locations. While city and people cannot be separated, I wonder whether this reading takes the detailed descriptions of the city and its splendour sufficiently seriously. Indexes of ancient sources, modern authors and selected topics round off this well produced volume (413-54).

Several of the essays of this volume have not been published previously, and most of the others have been updated and otherwise revised, at times heavily (a listing of the original place of publication is included in the introduction, xii). Gundry's essays show that traditional interpretations should not be given up too easily

and that they can be persuasively defended. At times the challenge posed by new interpretations helps to see the shortcomings but also the strengths of traditional readings. That such defence is not a matter of stubborn conservatism is clear from the fact that Gundry presents well argued historical, grammatical (etc.) studies, which need to be taken seriously. While many a degree has been gained and many a name been made with new interpretations and suggestions, Gundry's essays show that defence of traditional interpretations is no less exciting, intellectually challenging, plausible, necessary and last but not least – often of more use for the church than the Athenian characteristic of spending one's time in nothing but telling or hearing something new (Acts 17:21).

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This book, based on the 2006 Didsbury Lectures, is the first comprehensive study of the systematic, doctrinal and constructive theology produced within the major Nonconformist traditions (Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Methodist and United Reformed) during the twentieth century. In the first chapter the landscape is surveyed, with reference to such topics as the New Theology, the First World War, the reception of Karl Barth, the theological excitements of the 1960s, and pluralism. The second chapter concerns the major Christian doctrines: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, while in the third ecclesiological and ecumenical themes are discussed. Eschatology is treated in the concluding chapter, and there follows the author's assessment of the significance of twentieth-century Nonconformist theology, and his observations regarding its current state, future content and practitioners.

Alan P. F. Sell has held two pastorates and theological lecturing positions in England, Switzerland, Canada and Wales. He is now engaged full-time in research and writing, and in lecturing at home and abroad.

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