

I found the sentiment, peppered throughout, that Barth's and Schleiermacher's 'view is closer to the biblical view of election than the traditional individualistic view' (p. 201) unsupported, a claim now more difficult to assert in light of the challenges registered by David Gibson (see idem and Daniel Strange [eds], *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques* [Nottingham: Apollos, 2008], pp. 136-167). I was also expecting a bit more sustained discussion of the issues surrounding Barth's relationship to Schleiermacher or Gockel's supervisor's thesis about the role election played in Barth's development. I suspect this is due to the fact that Gockel is engaged in a 'systematic-theological comparison' rather than a genetic study. Still, readers should understand that the bulk of the material is an exposition of Barth and Schleiermacher with relatively minor and brief discussion of the study's implications.

Nevertheless, Gockel's study is detailed and attentive. It is, above all, a theological analysis. Therefore, scholars of these two modern theologians are not the only beneficiaries. Those working on the locus of election will find much to consider as they see the doctrinal repercussions of Barth's and Schleiermacher's views surfaced by Gockel.

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*Liberating Texts?  
Sacred Scriptures in Public Life*

eds. Sebastian C.H. Kim and Jonathan Draper

London: SPCK, 2008, xxii + 150 pp., £12.99, pb,  
ISBN 978-0-281-05856-3

*Rescuing the Bible  
(Blackwell Manifestos)*

Roland Boer

Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, vi + 177 pp., £15.99, pb,  
ISBN 978-1-4501-7020-8

**SUMMARY:**

Two very different books offer perspectives on how the Bible might play a role in public life and politics. One is a collection of essays offering a broadly positive vision of how non-fundamentalist approaches to sacred texts can liberate them to be, in their turn, liberating. One essay, though, suggests a darker possibility: that the Bible must be left behind to make progress. Roland Boer's book explores how to rescue what is liberating in the Bible, and incorporate it into a Marxist vision for a new worldly left. Both books explore an important question, but with significant limitations.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

Zwei sehr unterschiedliche Bücher bieten Perspektiven zur Frage, welche Rolle die Bibel im öffentlichen Leben und in der Politik spielen könnte. Das eine ist eine Artikel-

sammlung, die eine positive Vision zur Frage anbietet, wie nicht-fundamentalistische Ansätze zu heiligen Texten diese Texte befreien können, um ihrerseits befreiend wirken zu können. Ein Artikel schlägt jedoch eine dunklere Möglichkeit vor: dass man die Bibel hinter sich lassen muss, um Fortschritte zu machen. Roland Boers Buch untersucht, wie das, was in der Bibel befreiend ist, zu retten und in eine marxistische Vision einer neuen weltweiten Linken einzuverleiben ist. Beide Bücher untersuchen eine wichtige Frage – allerdings mit erheblichen Einschränkungen.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Deux ouvrages très différents apportent des perspectives sur le rôle que pourrait jouer la Bible dans la vie publique et la politique. L'un rassemble des articles qui offrent une vision positive de la façon dont des approches non fondamentalistes des textes sacrés peut les libérer pour qu'ils deviennent à leur tour libérateurs. L'une des contributions prône une approche plus négative: l'abandon de la Bible comme une nécessité du progrès. Le livre de Roland Boer cherche à mettre en lumière ce qui est libérateur dans la Bible, pour l'incorporer à une vision marxiste d'une nouvelle gauche mondaine. Ces deux livres traitent d'une question importante, mais leur apport présente de sérieuses limitations.

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Two rather different volumes here provide an interesting contrast on the same topic: what is the most helpful way to conceptualise the role of scripture in the public and political world at the beginning of the 21st century?

The six essays gathered by Kim and Draper were originally delivered as the Ebor lectures in York in 2006-07, serving as public occasions for theologians of various traditions to present overviews of their topic. The result is high-level snapshots, inevitably better at broad sketches of the terrain than detail. Thus we have Archbishop John Sentamu urging us to 'uncover the purposes of God' within the Bible, which include emphases on justice, vision, grace and change. David Ford offers some highlights of his project on *Christian Wisdom*, neatly contrasting the standard 'settlements' of religion in the public square found in France (too secular), the US (too separated) and the UK (appropriately complex), while calling for 'a minimal religious and secular framework'. Ataulah Siddiqui offers a summary of the Qu'ran as the eternal Revelation of Islam, before reviewing changing paradigms of interpretation in it as Islam wrestles with various ways of engaging with the canons of modernity. Frances Young suggests that each major religious tradition will be better enabled to find its role in a pluralist society by holding fast to its own sacred scripture. Shirley Williams gives a brief review of human rights in recent global conflicts and the disease with which the category of 'just war' has been too readily appropriated (and she includes a well-judged defence of the European Union as too little appreciated in the UK for a range of populist reasons).



A common theme in these essays (except perhaps the last) is the wide range of non-fundamentalist ways forward in each tradition. Thus the word-play of the title: one can liberate these texts from their captivity to the fundamentalist, and restore a glorious vision of the healing power of God/faith/tradition (depending on the essayist), thus revealing the text as newly liberating. I would like to believe it, and indeed largely agree with much of the (somewhat general) sentiment expressed here. But the gatecrasher to the party is Dan Cohn-Sherbok, who reviews with bracing clarity the fact that the Bible (or in his case, Jewish scripture) simply doesn't match up to such a vision consistently, and by way of a disarmingly frank reading of Christian Zionism as well as some blunt texts from Joshua, he concludes that the only way forward in religious debate (or at least in his chosen case study of the occupation of the land of Israel) is to 'take leave of the Bible' and embrace instead 'good will, compassion and common sense.' Which rather indicates that the discussion this book calls for has not yet begun, since none of the other contributors (in the limited space allotted to them, obviously) seems to feel the force of this problematic side to scripture.

But here the book by Boer comes marching centre stage and announces that the project of 'rescuing' the Bible from its own darker side and its captivity to right-wing political thought is exactly what is called for by what he describes as the 'worldly left', an alliance of good old liberal secularism and the minority 'religious left'. Boer's book faces head on the challenge of finding a liberating text in the midst of so much that tends to the reactionary, whether in intent or in its actual reception through the centuries. The book is written with typical Australian energy and eschews close referencing of its targets. Those solemnly sitting in public lectures in York may find analyses such as 'You simply have to be kidding if you think [the Synagogue and the Church] can on their own become prophetic bodies' slightly blunt, and evaluations such as 'ridiculous' and (the admittedly critiqued) 'Omgod isn't this terrible!' won't perhaps win him a sympathetic hearing.

Nevertheless, there is an important focus here on how the Bible can be read with an appropriate theological suspicion which will seek to discern how it can become life-giving while not ignoring its oppressive potential. There is also a striking and largely successful critique of secularism when it is confused with atheism. And there is much to appreciate in Boer's call for a recovery of the tradition of revolutionary readings of the Bible (which is almost exactly in line with the recent book by Rowland and Roberts, *The Bible for Sinners*), arguing that given the diversity of readings enabled by the polyvalent canon, one simply has to take a stand and mine the Bible for its own political myth of liberation, the condemnation of oppression, and the celebration of revolutionary chaos.

Boer is Marxist, and cheerfully admits up front that one may find echoes of *The Communist Manifesto* in this

book. How might one evaluate it? Well, it is I think a coherent political position (and this is basically an exercise in conceptualising a biblical politics after all), and one may have some sympathy with his critique of the religious right. His use of Ernst Bloch to describe the Bible as the 'bad conscience' of the Church is quite illuminating, and he has little difficulty running rings around various ways the politically conservative appeal to scripture, drawing examples from Australian public discourse as well as creation science in the USA (and Christian Zionism, again). Nevertheless, this political coherence does not of course map onto the contours of the biblical conception(s) of how life is to be lived. Boer somewhat takes this in his stride (hermeneutically this is a kind of *sachkritik* approach judging the text by its political vision), but then it is interesting to find him critiquing some right-wing polemic on the grounds of misappropriating the text. His view of the canon as the practice of political suppression of discordant voices is also problematic, not just because it is too simplistic to be of use historically, but also because if it were true it would surely undermine his insistence on the irreducible polyvalence of the biblical text in the first place.

In the end, then, Boer breaks out of the civilised discussion of the Kim/Draper volume to offer a prophetic rallying cry, and for my money is more alert to the difficulties of the liberating project envisioned by the essayists than they are (Cohn-Sherbok excepted), but his own view of the Bible as resource for the new world left will not satisfy those who would like to see the Bible taken on its own terms. The right discussion is being had in these two books, but there is a long way to go.

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### *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*

Walter Brueggemann

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

xviii + 213 pp., p/b, ISBN 9780521606295/ISBN 9780521844543

#### SUMMARY

In this volume the author discusses the main theological themes of the book of Jeremiah and asserts that the resounding theological note in the book is the sovereignty of God. The book's theology of restoration is quite different from that of Deuteronomy since the return of the nation is not dependent upon Israel's repentance, but is exclusively grounded in divine forgiveness. The place and function of the book of Jeremiah within the Old Testament canon is also considered, and Brueggemann concludes that it held a defining position in emerging Judaism.

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Autor diskutiert in diesem Band die theologischen Hauptthemen des Jeremiabuches und bekräftigt, dass die Souveränität Gottes die weithin klingende theologische