

*The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*

Brevard S. Childs

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SUMMARY

Childs here offers a history of the interpretation of Isaiah that focuses specifically on the question of how it is understood as Christian scripture. The focus is thus hermeneutical, and enables Childs to demonstrate a 'family resemblance' in Christian interpretation in spite of the different exegetical methods employed. Few could have covered this material with this level of insight, but there is a rich payoff in the concluding hermeneutical reflections where Childs enters a passionate plea for the canonical form of the Scripture to provide the rule of faith that continues to guide its interpretation.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Childs bietet hier eine Geschichte der Interpretation des Jesajabuches, die sich insbesondere auf die Frage konzentriert, wie das Buch als christliche Schrift verstanden wird. Das Augenmerk ist also hermeneutisch und versetzt Childs in die Lage, trotz der Unterschiede in den angewandten exegetischen Methoden eine „Familienähnlichkeit“ in der christlichen Interpretation aufzuzeigen. Nur wenige hätten dieses Material auf dieser einsichtsreichen Ebene behandeln können, doch die Lektüre wird mit den abschließenden hermeneutischen Reflektionen belohnt, in denen Childs ein leidenschaftliches Plädoyer für die kanonische Form der Schrift hält, die die Glaubensregel bereitstellt, die weiterhin die Schriftauslegung leitet.

RÉSUMÉ

Childs retrace ici l'histoire de l'interprétation du livre d'Ésaïe en s'intéressant particulièrement à la manière dont il a été compris en tant qu'écrit appartenant au canon chrétien des Écritures. L'approche est donc herméneutique et permet à l'auteur de démontrer l'existence d'une « ressemblance familiale » entre les interprétations chrétiennes du livre, en dépit des diverses méthodes exégétiques mises en œuvre. Peu de spécialistes auraient pu embrasser un tel champ d'étude avec autant de perspicacité, et l'entreprise recueille un riche butin: elle aboutit à des conclusions herméneutiques dans lesquelles Childs se fait le vibrant avocat de l'approche qui tire des Écritures sous leur forme canonique la règle de la foi qui continue à orienter leur interprétation.

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One of the recurring themes in the work of Brevard Childs was the importance of attention to the history of exegesis. The importance of this in the interpretation of individual passages was much in evidence in his *Exodus* commentary (OTL, London: SCM Press, 1974), and continued to be evident in his subsequent works. It was,

therefore, something of a surprise that it played such a relatively minor role in his *Isaiah* commentary (OTL, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), though there were occasional exceptions to this where he included sections reflecting on passages in light of the canon and their specific relationship to the New Testament (e.g., Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, 61). In some senses, these omissions blunted Childs' hermeneutical programme, especially given the relatively brief space afforded to introductory matters which were largely treated on a section by section basis rather. Although we are not treated to passage by passage analysis of the history of exegesis, this work (Child's last book before his death) fills at least part of the gap by providing an overview of the history of the interpretation of Isaiah, though with a specific focus on how it could be understood as Christian scripture.

To achieve this, Childs surveys the interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX through to post-modern interpretation. Including the LXX might seem odd at first since its production was hardly a Christian activity, but because it was constitutive for so much early Christian interpretation its importance cannot be set aside. Along with the LXX, Childs considers the NT as evidence of the earliest reception of Isaiah in his first chapter. This sets the pattern followed throughout the book, where Childs outlines the central hermeneutical issues evidenced by the interpreter under consideration, making use of contemporary debates about that interpreter (or interpreters) before examining sample texts and drawing his own conclusions. Childs demonstrates an astonishing breadth of reading and awareness as he leads readers through this, covering various Church Fathers (Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret), medieval interpreters (Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra), Reformers (Luther, Calvin) and a collection of interpreters from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and then post-modern interpretation represented by Walter Brueggemann. Each chapter closes with an extensive bibliography. Every selection of relevant interpreters is personal, but Childs' follows the central criterion that the interpreter concerned had to have written a commentary on Isaiah though there are points where he seems to chafe at the limitation he has placed on himself.

In a closing chapter, Childs offers his own hermeneutical reflections on this history, demonstrating that there is a family resemblance in Christian interpretations of Isaiah, although the exegetical models that were followed varied considerably. Here, we come to the heart of Childs' concerns as he stresses again the importance of understanding the Old Testament as Christian scripture, and thus consciously opposes himself to Brueggemann's post-modern turn. He is sympathetic to Brueggemann's concerns that the OT not be removed from its Jewish roots, but insists that faithful Christian interpretation cannot set aside the control that scripture as a whole, through the Spirit, exerts on us. Brueggemann's insist-

ence on the importance of imaginative construal by interpreters is thus rejected for failing to understand the nature of scripture. Rather, following the structure of his earlier work on Biblical Theology, the Christological content of the Bible is to be honoured whilst attending to its development and relationship to history. Here then is the book's great contribution, and it is a fitting memorial to a pivotal scholar. Faithful Christian interpretation cannot be constrained by the limits of modernity, but neither can it accept the relativity of post-modernity. Instead, Childs challenges us to seek a reading of scripture as a whole that is controlled by the canon as the rule of faith.

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### *Dizionario di teologia evangelica*

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#### SUMMARY

The *Dizionario di Teologia Evangelica* is a one-volume compilation of articles across a broad spectrum of disciplines. Its distinctiveness rests in its *interdisciplinary* nature, with articles ranging from Biblical studies, to historical, systematic and practical theology. The entries are impressively clear and concise, self-consciously within Reformed classical evangelicalism. The dictionary draws together the best of international evangelical theology, both English-speaking and European, and presents it as an essential holistic unity; a noteworthy achievement within the fragmented evangelical context of Roman Catholic Europe. Useful bibliographies and appendices give freedom to explore topics to greater depth, beyond this collection of over 600 articles. An excellent work.

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das *Dizionario di Teologia Evangelica* ist eine einbändige Zusammenstellung von Artikeln, die eine große Bandbreite an Disziplinen abdecken. Seine Besonderheit beruht auf seinem *interdisziplinären* Wesen, mit Artikeln, die von bibelwissenschaftlichen über historische und systematische bis zu Beiträgen der praktischen Theologie reichen. Die Beiträge sind beeindruckend klar und nicht ausschweifend; sie bewegen sich bewusst innerhalb des reformierten klassischen Evangelikalismus. Das Lexikon vereint das Beste aus der internationalen evangelikalen Theologie der englischsprachigen und europäischen Welt, und es präsentiert diese Theologie als eine im Wesentlichen ganzheitliche Einheit; eine bemerkenswerte Leistung innerhalb des fragmentierten evangelikalen Kontextes im römisch-katholischen Europa. Nützliche Bibliographien und Anhänge ermöglichen es, die Themen vertieft und über diese Sammlung von 600 Artikeln hinaus zu untersuchen. Ein hervorragendes Werk.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Le *Dizionario di Teologia Evangelica* rassemble en un volume des articles qui couvrent une large gamme de disciplines. Sa particularité réside en son caractère interdisciplinaire. Il contient en effet des articles d'études bibliques et de théologie historique, systématique et pratique. Les articles sont remarquablement clairs et concis ; ils s'inscrivent délibérément dans une ligne évangélique calviniste classique. L'ouvrage rassemble ce que la théologie évangélique internationale a produit de meilleur, à la fois dans le monde anglo-saxon et en Europe. L'ensemble présente une unité fondamentale, ce qui apparaît comme un exploit au sein du monde évangélique fragmenté que l'on rencontre dans la partie catholique romaine de l'Europe. Des bibliographies et des appendices donnent d'utiles indications pour aller au-delà de ces six cents articles et creuser davantage les sujets abordés. Un excellent ouvrage!

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The *Dizionario di teologia evangelica* (*Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*) is an impressive one-volume work, boasting a collection of clear and concise articles across a broad spectrum of theological disciplines. In fact, this is precisely its purpose – here is a dictionary which presents itself as an *interdisciplinary* work, seeking to establish fruitful connections across a range of theological disciplines, in ways that distinguish it from many other theological dictionaries. Articles range from Biblical studies (eg. books and key characters of the Bible), to questions of Historical theology (with articles describing important figures of church history and theological debates surrounding them), to those of Systematic theology (with articles exploring key doctrinal questions), and Practical theology (with articles exploring ethical, ecclesiological and missiological issues). It is an impressively clear, concise and integrated project, self-consciously defined within the tradition of Reformed classical evangelicalism.

Although conceived intentionally within and for the Italian church context, it is by no means 'parochial'. Rather, it seeks to draw together the best of international evangelical theology, both English-speaking and from other parts of Europe. Some of its articles are therefore adapted from other evangelical dictionaries (eg. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed Elwell, *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed Ferguson/Packer/Wright, as well as *Grand Dictionnaire de la Bible*). The breadth of articles is noteworthy, from introduction of Biblical books and characters, to key historical theologians, an exploration of Biblical and systematic doctrines, questions of Biblical ethics, key events and debates of church history, to articles on present evangelicalism. Yet the interdisciplinary range of articles does not leave the dictionary without an essential core; it serves rather to highlight the essential holistic unity and integrity of evangelical theology. This is an immensely useful and enriching vision, all the more so for the historically fragmented evangelical context of Italy. The book introduces not only a historical