

There was, he argues, a cognitive dissonance between what was actually happening in Britain during the 1990s and the hype and rhetoric of some leading evangelicals. This may, he also suggests, have contributed to the overall trend of evangelical decline in post-modern Britain.

The overall trends Warner discerns do not make encouraging reading: '...the massive levels of indifference to organised religion among young adults suggests that evangelicals may have enjoyed a brief flurry of prominence in the residual remains of the churches in England before the entire edifice of organised and institutional Christianity sinks into an accelerating or even terminal decline.' (4) More positively the expansion of the Alpha courses across the UK and world is also analysed; Warner concludes that its '... all-round strengths vindicate its position as the market leader among evangelistic programmes.' (122) Here, too, however, a salutary note is struck as indications of Alpha's (later) lower take-up are considered alongside the perennial problem of how institutionalisation weakens impact. The exciting growth of TEAR Fund is also traced in this section – as an example of what can happen when the best of evangelicalism's social ethic learns to engage constructively with the values of a post-modern society.

In the second part Warner examines what he suggests is the second main axis of evangelicalism during these four decades: the biblicist-crucicentric axis. This is not an easy read as the strap-line for this section demonstrates: 'From pre-critical inclusivity to the self-attenuated Calvinistic hegemony, and the subsequent emergence of post- and neo-conservatism, with bifurcatory prospects.' This book is not for deck-chair reading! Warner examines, with his characteristic evangelical-theological accuracy, many of the key doctrinal statements of faith which emerged over the period in question. These include Keele 1967, Lausanne 1974, Nottingham 1977, LBC 1998 and IVCF 2000. His conclusions are that the tensions in the 1960s between Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott over the future direction of evangelicalism have, in fact, been replayed over much of the period. Issues such as revelation, soteriology, social justice and the role of women in leadership, alongside continuing tensions about what exactly biblical inerrancy may or may not mean, threaten to bring about a divorce within pan-evangelicalism. There is, Warner concludes, 'a deepening polarisation' in evidence over the period.

Warner ends his study by outlining two possible scenarios for British evangelicalism in the 21st century: 'If European secularization should prove terminal... evangelicals can now be expected to face late-onset decline, followed by full participation in the death of Christian Europe. However, if European secularization proves to be self-limiting... the futures of evangelicalism depend on which sectors of the evangelical tradition survive and prosper through the internecine battles of reconstruction currently in ferment.' (242-243)

Warner's stated aim is that his work will build on the classic study by David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*

*in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. The style of this book is far from Bebbingtonian. But he succeeds.

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## Barth's Theology of Interpretation

Donald Wood

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### SUMMARY

In this fine book Donald Wood argues that for Barth the interpretation of Scripture depends on a *doctrinal* account of the reader's location (the church) and of the reader's own relationship to both the Lord of the church and to the biblical text. In this way, hermeneutics comes to be understood in soteriological terms rather than in epistemological or technical terms. For Barth, the decisive interpretative issues are the forgiveness of sins and the obedience of faith.

### RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet ouvrage bien fait, Donald Wood montre que, pour Barth, l'interprétation de l'Écriture dépend à la fois de la manière dont le lecteur se situe doctrinalement (de la tradition de son Église) et de sa propre relation au Seigneur de l'Église et au texte biblique. De la sorte, il comprend l'herméneutique en termes sotériologiques plutôt qu'en termes épistémologiques ou techniques. À ses yeux, les interprétations décisives sont celles qui sont relatives au pardon des péchés et à l'obéissance de la foi.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem ausgezeichneten Buch vertritt Donald Wood folgendes Argument: Für Barth hängt die Auslegung der Schrift von dem *lehrmäßigen* Kontext des „Sitzes im Leben“ des Lesers ab (in Kirche und Gemeinde) sowie von der ureigenen Beziehung des Lesers sowohl zum Herrn der Gemeinde als auch zum biblischen Text. Auf diese Weise wird Hermeneutik eher in sotériologischem Zusammenhang verstanden als in epistemologischer oder technischer Hinsicht. Für Barth liegt der entscheidende Punkt für die Auslegung bei Sündenvergebung und Glaubensgehorsam.

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This book is a slightly revised version of Donald Wood's doctoral thesis (Oxford, 2004), carried out under the supervision of John Webster. It is a self-effacing work, more modest than it needs to be about its central contentions and its method of mining what Barth thinks is happening when the church opens the pages of Holy Scripture.

Elegantly written throughout, the greatest strengths of this work are located precisely in the simplicity of its claims because Wood has written in the genre of commentary. This kind of writing is all too rare in much academic discourse which presumes to tell us what a great thinker thought (often in conceptually abstract



terms) without tying us to close attention to their words or mandating patient listening to their way of putting things. If Wood's treatment simply opens up 'lines of enquiry that require far more extensive and nuanced treatment' (175), then further workers in the field of Barth's theology of interpretation will now know where – and more importantly, how – to dig. Wood need not be as apologetic as he often is that he has not done more than this here.

The driving argument of the book can be easily stated. For Barth, 'the primary thing to be said about the interpretation of scripture is that it is dependent wholly upon a logically and indeed materially prior hearing that, being coincident with the forgiveness of sins, is to be explicated in soteriological rather than abstractly hermeneutical terms' (173). With care and attention to detail, over four tightly argued chapters, Wood pieces together the moves which are constituent in Barth's soteriological explication of interpretation.

In Chapter 1 (Discoveries and Developments), Wood explores some representative texts from 1917-1924, namely Barth's 'Die neue Welt' lecture, the first two editions of the *Römerbrief* (with special attention to Barth's reading of Romans 4) and some of Barth's Göttingen lectures. Here we see Barth developing a christologically construed understanding of the unity of history, and so Wood is able to shed significant light on the theological presuppositions of Barth's approach to historical-critical exegesis. We learn how Barth begins to describe the relationship between text and reader 'in terms drawn from the Bible itself' (xii) so that interpretation is actually consequent upon the reader not trying to exempt themselves from 'the humanity bound together in sin by the judgment of God in Christ' (17). Chapter 2 (History and the Politics of Interpretation) treats Barth's lectures on modern Protestant theology to illuminate his claim that his scriptural hermeneutics are actually generally applicable, and this reading is then brought into contact with some contrasting approaches in modern hermeneutics.

In many ways these first two chapters are prolegomena: the real focus is the doctrinal account of scriptural reading in *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 and 1/2. Chapter 3 (Revelation and the Grounds of Interpretation) focuses on the theological necessity of scriptural interpretation; Chapter 4 (Hearing and Obeying the Word of God) on the character and limits of interpretation as an act of obedience by the reading church. Here, the explication of how the first volume of the *CD* actually works as a text is as fine as I have read: the attention to flow of argument as Barth explains the dogmatic function of prolegomena; the understanding of Barth as constantly working in light of and against the two main alternative systems of Roman Catholicism and modern Protestantism; the way in which Wood shows how Barth is locating his Reformed scripture principle within a trinitarian doctrine of revelation – each of these are lessons in how to read Barth. Throughout Chapters 3 and 4,

the treatment of Barth's architectonic 'witness' motif for Scripture is deft and insightful, understood in both ontological as well as hermeneutical terms, and Chapter 4 is a compelling theological account of obedience as Barth's fundamental norm for reading the Bible. The overall effect is 'a shift in the anthropological component of a theological hermeneutics' (151): the self-positing reader is searched and shattered and owned by the free Lord of the church, and therefore comes instead to read in the obedience of faith.

There are some gaps: the treatment of inspiration is surprisingly thin, resulting in no real explanation of how the humanity of the biblical writings (crystal clear in Wood's treatment) is held alongside Barth's claim that, in the miraculous event of revelation, 'God himself now says what the text says'. For this reviewer at least, Barth's approach is problematic and Wood's largely one-sided treatment of scripture's creaturely status in Barth did not alleviate my perplexity. The treatment of 'the Time of Revelation' in Chapter 3 remained opaque despite several readings; doubtless the problem lies with Barth here, or most likely with the reviewer, rather than with Wood's treatment.

In all this, Wood has produced a fine study. He provides us with a theology of scriptural reading which opens up to contemporary approaches such as John Webster's *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge, 2003). It is to be hoped that what Barth gives us, and what Wood gives us from Barth, will lead to more of the same in years to come and, on the evidence of this work, hopefully from Wood himself.

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### *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews. A Study in Narrative Re-presentation*

David M. Allen

WUNT II 238, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, Pb., ix + 277 pp., € 54,-, ISBN 978-3-16-149566-3

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

David Allen bringt in seiner Dissertation (Edinburgh) einen Neuansatz für Hintergrund und Verständnis der paränetischen Abschnitte des Hebräerbriefes. Von deuteronomistischer Perspektive zeigt er auf, welchen Einfluss das Deuteronomium, insbesondere das Lied des Mose auf die Paränese des Hebräerbriefes hat. Dabei werden die verschiedenen textlichen, thematischen und rhetorischen Verbindungen zwischen beiden Büchern aufgezeigt und untersucht. So finden sich neben 21 Zitaten und Anspielungen auch die gemeinsamen thematischen Motive Bund, Segen und Fluch sowie Land und der homiletische Charakter von paränetischer Dringlichkeit. In Anlehnung an das Deuteronomium werde den Empfängern des Hebräerbriefes die Situation des Gottesvolkes an der Schwelle des verheißenen Landes bzw. Heils vor Augen gestellt, welche sie vor die Wahl zwischen Segen und Fluch stellt.