

BOOK REVIEW

I. Howard Marshall *et al.*, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004). 136 pp. Pbk. US\$15.00.

These essays present the substance of several lectures offered first to a Toronto meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research in 2002, and subsequently at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Accepting as foundational the inspiration and authority of the biblical text, yet seeking to go 'beyond Scripture' in establishing guidelines for the development of doctrine and the application of scriptural principles in today's world, Marshall attempts to steer a course between the Scylla of inflexible biblical literalism and the Charybdis of a reductionist liberalism.

In Chapter 1, 'Evangelicals and Hermeneutics', Marshall describes the way in which evangelical scholars, operating within a confessional framework, have over the past thirty years come to a more nuanced appreciation of hermeneutical concerns, whether at the level of general hermeneutics, textual exegesis, or exposition and application. By way of example, he cites fuller appreciation of the theological and literary character of biblical texts, and of the relevance of canonical context, listing the contributions of particular scholars to current debate (e.g. Lundin, Thiselton, Vanhoozer, Bartholomew and Green). In conversation with J.I. Packer, Marshall then addresses questions of contemporary application, noting as problems a lack of consensus even among evangelical interpreters (e.g. regarding apartheid or cessationism), modern ethical issues not envisaged by the biblical text, and the appropriateness of challenging societal practices (such as slavery or non-representative government) that seem largely unquestioned by biblical writers. Marshall is particularly concerned that for 'belief and behaviour' alike, principles of interpretation should derive from Scripture itself, rather than from some extraneous philosophical standpoint. This position seems close to the concerns of many post-liberal and narrative

interpreters, of which only the latter approach is mentioned, but without further discussion.

In Chapter 2, 'The Development of Doctrine', Marshall sketches the essentialist/conservative and the developmental/progressive approaches to biblical interpretation in the areas of ethics, worship practices, and especially systematic theology, illustrating the need for greater clarity with reference to the considerable diversity of opinion on such matters, again among interpreters who nonetheless identify themselves as 'evangelical'. Given this reality, says Marshall, '*it is especially the duty of evangelical Christians to provide some kind of reasoned, principled approach to the question of the development of doctrine from Scripture*' (p. 45; emphasis original). For guidance, Marshall looks to ways in which New Testament writers went beyond the worldview of the Jewish Scriptures (specifically, with regard to God as 'Father', God as threefold, non-Jews as the 'people of God', concepts of the afterlife, and the supersession of some Pentateuchal legislation); to their development and creative re-presentation of Jesus' own teaching (e.g. moving away from Jesus' characteristic emphasis on the reign of God); and to the early Church's development of doctrine in response to new revelation and new needs, as well as in reaction to perceived theological error.

Chapter 3, 'The Search for Biblical Principles', proposes guidelines based on such confessional and New Testament precedents. Focusing first on the use of Leviticus by New Testament authors, Marshall concludes that the ethical intent of Pentateuchal legislation is still binding on the followers of Jesus, but that the new covenant Christ has established provides the hermeneutical grid for interpreting this and all parts of Hebrew Scripture (p. 60). Next, contending that the pre-Easter Jesus presents the inauguration (but not, therefore, the full form) of 'the kingdom of God', Marshall argues that Jesus' own teaching is in principle 'underdeveloped' and 'elementary' (in its Christology, soteriology, and pneumatology, for example [p. 64]), and that certain aspects of his teaching (such as imagery of a fiery hell or references to the Jerusalem Temple) are relevant only to their original historical and cultural setting. Since the early Church adduced a 'fixed tradition' or 'apostolic deposit' of doctrine (e.g. 1 Cor. 12.3; 1 Jn 4.2-3), based on but not limited to the teaching of Jesus, and because the Christian community continued to adapt and reapply these beliefs under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so later believers may do the same. Marshall

illustrates the use of this model regarding developments in Christology and ecclesiology in the Pastoral epistles.

Such an approach will not seem particularly surprising or innovative for interpreters of a less conservative outlook than that to which these essays are addressed. But for an evangelical audience, more may need to be said as to how ‘developments in doctrine and new understandings after the closing of the canon’ (p. 79) can remain faithful to the authority of Scripture, or a doctrinal core derived from Scripture, while yet going ‘beyond Scripture’. This is precisely the issue Kevin Vanhoozer takes up in his response to what he jocularly designates the ‘Marshall plan’ (p. 83). Specifically, Vanhoozer confesses discomfort with Marshall’s relativization of Jesus’ teaching prior to the resurrection (especially as regards Jesus’ depiction of God), which, he observes, betrays precisely the kind of prior theological assumptions that responsible exegesis should seek to avoid. Vanhoozer notes the lack of reference to recent (and ongoing) discussion of biblical theology and its methodology among evangelicals and post-liberals in particular. As his own contribution to the debate, he proposes that interpreters may ‘go beyond’ Scripture in the sense (from Calvin) of formulating concepts that clarify Scripture itself; of continuing (with William Webb) ‘redemptive trajectories’ initially mapped out in the sacred text; of discerning (with Nicholas Wolterstorff) a divine intent and meaning that is not limited to the literal, ‘human’ discourse of the text; or, finally, of extending ‘patterns of judgment’ evident in Scripture—‘rule-governed forms of covenantal behavior that direct the seeing, judging, and acting of the believing community’ (p. 94)—to new cultural contexts.

In a further response, Stanley E. Porter first lauds Marshall’s contribution to British evangelical scholarship, then sets his work within the context of five other contemporary approaches to biblical interpretation. First is the historical-critical method, with regard to which Porter raises numerous methodological concerns, most addressing the relationship between theological truth and historiographical presuppositions. Second is Thiselton’s distinction, from Wittgenstein, of different classes of utterance—a classification Porter finds problematic because it is un-workable in practice. Porter then offers a lengthy critique of a third approach, speech-act theory, particularly as employed by Vanhoozer. For the fourth approach, he recapitulates much of Marshall’s presentation, concurring with Vanhoozer’s challenge that Marshall’s interpretative methodology is impaired by cultural

presuppositions of its own. Finally, Porter outlines—in terms of content—the core beliefs that govern Paul’s hermeneutic (the existence and activity of God; ‘Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior’ [p. 122]; Christian discipleship as modelling human existence on the life of Jesus) and—methodologically—pro-poses an interpretative strategy based on the ‘dynamic equivalence’ theory of Eugene Nida.

Although the inclusion of such detailed responses obviates lengthy additional engagement with Marshall’s argument, two brief observations are in order. First, the identity of Marshall’s intended audience seems to be assumed, rather than explained. Yet the term ‘evangelical’ can have significantly different social, political, and even theological overtones in Britain than in Canada, the United States, or elsewhere. Given the prominence of various ‘evangelicalisms’ in the non-aligned world, acknowledgement of non-Western perspectives would have added depth to the discussion. More substantively, the approaches outlined in these essays are vulnerable to the critique offered in various forms by Lesslie Newbigin (e.g. *Foolishness to the Greeks* [1986], *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* [1989]) and others that the liberal–conservative battle for Scripture remains locked in an unwinnable contest based on rules of engagement established by the Enlightenment. Accordingly, this series of lectures should be read alongside other recent proposals for finding a way out of the impasse, whether on the part of those who continue to identify themselves as broadly ‘evangelical’ (e.g. Zondervan’s ‘Scripture and Hermeneutics’ series, to which Marshall refers [p. 23]), or from perspectives classified as post-evangelical, post-liberal, and the like.

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