

BOOK REVIEW

Bauer, David R., and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). xvi + 446 pp. Hbk. US\$34.99.

When one's subject is biblical hermeneutics, there is a wide variety of ways in which to write a text (and, appropriately, perhaps as many methods from which to choose). Within this spectrum, the present book defines itself as a detailed presentation of inductive Bible study methods. That means, among other things, that the book deliberately lacks the scope of other texts, such as Stanley Porter and Beth Stovell's edited volume, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Rather, Bauer and Traina describe this work as a more comprehensive sequel to the now-late Traina's classic *Methodical Bible Study* (New York: Ganis & Harris, 1952). They follow up this description with occasional references to the preceding work, especially where it affords more detailed discussions than they choose to provide here (e.g. pp. xiii and 255 n. 6 on allegorical applications of exegesis).

The volume is divided into five parts: Theoretical Foundations, Observing and Asking, Answering or Interpreting, Evaluating and Appropriating, and Correlation. Within these sections, the numbers and lengths of individual chapters vary considerably, so instructors may face challenges in the selection of course readings; but the overall trajectory is clear and unswervingly thorough.

The authors focus their introduction on defining and unpacking induction itself, over against deduction first, and then as 'a movement in the history of hermeneutics' with distinctive 'lay-oriented' traditions in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and many seminaries (pp. 1-2). They map characteristic emphases of inductive study, including such features as 'serious attention to the ways students can identify for themselves literary structure and can show how such structure informs the meaning of the text' (p. 4), as well as induction's spiracular (repeatedly self-correcting), highly integrative approach. They quickly establish induc-

tive study's concern for biblical theology, a concern borne out by the book's purposeful march toward canonical correlation. They also clarify that theirs is by no means the only inductive approach available, and that they present it here in an idealized form that they hope will prove adaptable. They close with an overview of the book's contents and some suggestions for reading, leaving the door open for readers to practice an inductive approach as they read the book itself and become aware of how the constituent parts relate to one another and to the whole.

One of the book's strengths, immediately evinced in 'Theoretical Foundations', is how accessibly it presents the fundamentals of method, from its character, content and criteria in the preface to this section (pp. 13-15) to the composition of inferential reasoning. (Their statement, 'Thus "therefore" or its equivalent stands between one or more premises and an inference', makes for a particularly apt illustration on p. 20.) The authors also excel at asking questions of communal versus individual interpretation, and they press readers to question their assumptions, precisely as readers, in an early chapter on transjective (i.e. dynamically objective and subjective) study, reflecting upon the dialectic of Scripture as witnessing object and beckoning subject. After exploring some of the basics of the literary relationship between author, text and reader, they pause to consider the role of spiritual experience in exegesis. They wisely follow this point with a chapter on 'Intentional and Rational Study', dealing sensitively with any readers who may harbor anti-intellectual fears 'out of an often unarticulated suspicion that any serious reliance upon the intellect is an affront to God and an impediment to hearing God's voice in the Scripture' (p. 40). Their next chapter, 'Re-Creative Study', is a well-argued review of implied authorship and readership, though they cannot have considered 'all the dynamics bound up in the communicative function of texts' as they say they have by this point (p. 42).

The last six chapters of Part 1 are concise and well worth reading. 'Direct Study' expands upon the authors' previous appeal to readers to encounter biblical texts for themselves first (rather than starting with commentaries), so that they can better evaluate commentaries when they turn to them. 'Comprehensive and Integrated Study' commends a richly holistic, non-reductionist approach, but Bauer and Traina might have said a few more words about the notion of the 'cohering center'—is it theocentric? christocentric? redemptive-historical?—around which

the components of study should integrate (p. 56). ‘Individual and Communal Study’, like ‘Direct Study’, enlarges upon a previously noted priority, one that resurfaces often. The authors insist that both the process of biblical study and conclusions drawn from it must be individual and communal, as individual reflection and interpersonal dialogue each have parts to play in balancing determinacy with indeterminacy. ‘Compositional Book Study’ reminds the reader of the integrity and contextual importance of whole books when studying individual passages. Quite logically, ‘Canonical Study’ comes next, which recognizes the interrelated character of biblical books and probes the paradox of hearing the divine voice in historically and humanly conditioned documents. Finally, ‘Flexible Procedural Study’ paves the way for the next section: it charts the relationship between methodological foundations (more certain and essential, once established) and the process of observation, interpretation, evaluation, application and correlation (more specific, yet provisional).

Part 2 addresses the observational steps in the process just noted. Opening the section, the authors ask readers to encounter the biblical text anew, with imaginative perception, categorical precision, persistence and impartiality, insofar as they are able. The first full chapter here is on the ‘Survey of Books-as-Wholes’, which is a way of ‘getting a sense of what the writer set out to do’ without becoming ‘bogged down in details’ (pp. 79, 80). The lesson also applies to this book as a whole, as the chapters here grow fewer in number but longer and more technical. The authors prioritize the tasks of identifying general materials, key passages, major impressions and larger structural relationships, units and emphases. They offer examples along the way. For example, while explaining particularization as a variety of semantic structure, they extrapolate from Joel 1.1 that the implied author’s ‘unique experience of prophetic inspiration’ should give us pause if tempted ‘to draw a definite and direct connection between catastrophic events in our nation and the judgment of God upon the nation’s sins’ (p. 100). Where appropriate, the authors continue to hint at the reading of canons-as-wholes, too. They close this chapter with suggestions on the formulation of interpretive questions—an exemplary implementation of their book survey methods on 2 Timothy (with 3.16-17 serving as an ongoing example of such implementation throughout the book)—and corresponding exercises for readers to undertake themselves.

The second and third chapters of Part 2 survey the study of ‘Parts-as-Wholes (Divisions, Sections, Segments)’ within given books and the discipline of ‘Focused Observation’. The first of these involves identification of literary form/genre; much of the chapter is given over to an analysis of the discursive functions of exhortation in the segment 2 Tim. 3.1–4.8 (the diagrams at this point, linking causes to effects and the like, will start to look familiar to many who have learned inductive methods at more popular levels, though these are of course more complex). Focused observational skills begin with knowing the types of, and guidelines and purposes for, observation; one wonders if the appeal for clarity in making observations is ruefully autobiographical, lest students ‘wonder what they themselves meant by the observations they earlier recorded’ (p. 163). Again, Bauer and Traina model the crafting of observations and corresponding questions for follow-up based on 2 Tim. 3.16–17. They close with a similar explanation and model (based on Psalm 8) of detailed analysis (i.e. correlative outlining), as opposed to observation above.

‘Answering or Interpreting’ begins with a chapter on ‘Selecting Questions and Formulating Premises’. The authors’ consideration of the category of ‘Scriptural Testimony’ deserves particular attention, for here they explore the ‘world within the biblical canon’ (p. 191) and the conceptual and textual coherence found there with a rare combination of depth and simplicity. They also draw such scriptural testimony, along with word usage and historical background, into their hermeneutical model of informational exchange between author and reader. Their discussions of inflection, syntax, genre and other interpretive determinants are likewise strong. I wish they had said more about the interpretation of rhetorical devices (noted simply as a ‘promising area of historical background’, p. 217), since socio-rhetorical criticism would seem to be especially advantageous here as an inductive method of studying text and culture. Nevertheless, I found a timely reminder in their warnings about the danger of morphological over-interpretation, based on the example of the term *ekklēsia*. Chapter 15, ‘Drawing Inferences from the Premises’, outlines inferential reasoning, while Chapter 16 explains interpretive implementation. Here, and in Chapter 18, the detailed description of possible interpretive fallacies is helpful, but some readers may wish (as I did) for more explicitly stated, positive examples or means by which to avoid the fallacies in question.

Part 4, 'Evaluating and Appropriating', involves much more than the well-rehearsed, final hermeneutical step of 'application'—a term slightly de-emphasized here because it 'suggests a narrowly cognitive and behavioral focus' (p. 279 n. 2). Bauer and Traina continue to excel in asking questions, whether on the fulfillment of Scripture's 'transcendent purposes' (p. 282), the necessity of proceeding to evaluation rather than viewing interpretation as an end unto itself, or the validity, force and scope of biblical statements. If biblical theology has seldom been mentioned as such until this later stage of the book (though it is often assumed in relation to the priorities of canon, genre and the relationship of reader and text), the authors now pull no punches. As they address the evaluative challenges posed by progressive revelation, they find that 'the overarching theological problem in the writings of the New Testament is the relationship between the covenants... This focus remains the fundamental issue in biblical theology and ethics' (p. 297, with an acknowledgment that the New Testament authors themselves engaged in appropriation, p. 298). They then structure biblical ethics under the rubric of God's redemptive lordship, without neglecting either the procedural distinctions between Old and New Testament passages or the issue of correspondence between ancient and modern situations.

Finally, Part 5, 'Correlation', serves appropriately to correlate the processes outlined up to this point and the information gathered through them. The authors readily admit that correlation is needed at literary, canonical and general levels, but they are more concerned with mapping correlational character, practice and implementation: 'the Bible invites, and indeed requires, that readers explore connections between the teachings of Scripture and the facts of the world as one encounters them' (p. 343). Bauer and Traina rightly recognize how daunting—and even unending—correlation can be, but their list of fallacies to avoid is mercifully brief this time around, and their example, focusing again on 2 Timothy and its implied author's appeal to the authority of Scripture, is probing and thoroughly integrative. The briefest of epilogues reminds us that the book should serve not as the final word on inductive study but as 'a testimonial regarding what we have found meaningful in both study and teaching' (p. 361). The book concludes with six appendices; these will likely prove more useful for reference than for classroom use, though Appendix A's delimitation of inductive from deductive reasoning may serve as 'further reading' pursuant to the volume's first chapters. Instructors may also wish to supplement the types of biblical

criticism explained in Appendix E, but they will find that this is one of the very few places in which this commendable textbook is not quite as comprehensive as it claims to be.

Matthew Forrest Lowe
Dundas Baptist Church, Dundas, Ontario