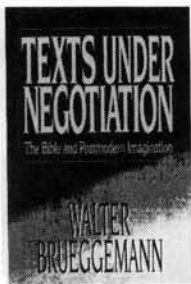


A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT SCRIPTURE

TEXTS UNDER NEGOTIATION:
THE BIBLE AND POSTMODERN IMAGINATION

by Walter Brueggemann
Fortress Press, 1993
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Reviewed by James E. Faulconer



Walter Brueggemann's postmodern approach to scripture replaces modern critical methods of interpretation with communal stories whose complex and ambiguous meaning subvert the culture of the world.

IN 1974, Hans Frei wrote *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*.¹ Though his book has had important effects in theology—in what is called narrative theology—few except theologians know the work. That is unfortunate, because Frei offers an alternative to our usual ways of understanding scriptural texts; he offers a way between the seemingly exclusive alternatives: reading scripture via the assumptions and methods of historical criticism, or defending it with the assumptions and methods of conservative religious ideology.

For me, the most important part of Frei's book is his discussion of the origins of currently dominant attitudes toward scripture interpretation. Those origins, he argues, are to be found in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about how to understand the Bible. According to Frei, the problem with those debates is that both sides used the same assumptions about the nature of texts and interpretation (the assumptions of "modernism") and, thus, both groups ig-

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nored the possibility for understanding the Bible that we can see in premodern interpretation (interpretation prior to about 1500).

THE PRECRITICAL APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

Historical events weren't separated from the telling of a story, because there was no history separate from the meaning of history.

ONE way to understand the difference between the modernist assumptions shared today by both conservative literalists and *historico-critical* biblical researchers is to see the difference between modern (critical) and premodern (precritical) understandings of "literal interpretation." For precritical interpreters, it is not too much to say that figural interpretation and literal interpretation are inextricably connected, while for critical interpreters (and we are critical interpreters, whether we are conservatives or liberals in interpretation), they are opposites. As we see it, we can give a figural or a literal interpretation of something, but we do not see them as supplementary to each other and, sometimes, even identical. Precritically, however, the figured

story was the literal truth. The word *literal* means "by the letter," so for the precritical interpreter, the literal truth was the truth told us by the text. But the word *literal* shifts in meaning between the medievals and the moderns. Effectively, the modern period reverses the direction of interpretation. In the precritical period, the narrative gave us access to history, so the literal truth was the truth told us by the text. Conversely, in the modern period, history gives us the criteria for deciding whether stories are true or false, so the literal truth is the truth that corresponds to objective history (which exists independent of the narratives that relate that history). Thus, for moderns, the narrative functions, at best, as evidence for, or a report of, the event. If we do not have immediate access to the event—as we cannot with historical events—then we must have a method for reconstructing, as accurately as possible, what an objective observation of it would give as its description. For moderns, the literal truth is the truth by which we judge the text instead of the truth told us by the text. The events are the standard for deciding the truth of texts. In contrast, precritically, the text is the standard for knowing and thinking about events; the figured narrative is not just a way for us to verify that a past event occurred. Rather, *the narrative—with its figures and the figures that connect it to other narratives—is the access, the only access, to the event itself.*

Because our world view is distinctly and thoroughly modern, this distinction is difficult to grasp. We tend to reduce the precritical version of literalism to contemporary conservative literalism. We think that precritical interpreters also believed that the text accurately describes the events to which it refers and that those events can, in principle, be known outside the text, preferably by immediate observation. Conservative modernists believe that scriptural narratives are an objective description of events; nonconservative modernists do not. We assume that the premodern position is just an earlier instance of the position taken by conservative modernists. Frei argues, however, that when we reduce precritical literalism to contemporary conservative literalism, we make the same mistake that religious people made when they were confronted with the attacks on scripture of such thinkers as Anthony Collins and Thomas Paine. With the eighteenth-century critics of the Bible, we assume that scriptural texts are and ought to be representations of events. We then argue about how accurately a text represents the event or events in question. For the precritical reader,

The culture within which we live—and not Christianity itself—gives the framework within which we see and understand the possibilities for life. Christian scripture reading and faithful preaching is to disrupt the apparently seamless continuity of the dominant culture and to offer the possibility of a gospel culture.

however, the Bible is not just the representation of various series of events. In fact, representation is probably not the best metaphor to use in describing what understanding meant precritically. Rather than being a representation—a re-presentation—of past events, for precritical readers, scripture gives the access to the events of history. It gives the events, their connection to each other, and the meaning of those events—none of which could be separated from the other. For a precritical reader, the figurative character of the scriptural text (the Book of Mormon's "types and shadows") is primarily what gives the events of the text their existence as meaningful events and their connection to one another.

Obviously, critical history must also choose between the events it will describe, and it must decide which features of those events are relevant. Shakespeare making a laundry list is not an event of the same significance as his writing *Hamlet*. Not choosing some events rather than others, and some features rather than others, would make history writing impossible. The question is, how do we choose what we decide to focus on? How do we decide the significance of events? Unlike precritical historians, modern historians believe that question can be answered apart from knowing the event itself: we can know the event, and we can decide its significance, but these are two different acts. For premodern readers, however, if you didn't see the figuration—the significance—then you didn't see the history. It isn't just that you didn't see the meaning of history. Since, precritically, there was no history separate from the meaning of history—separate from its figuration, from its "shape"—not to see the figures or to see them incorrectly was not to see accurately the history itself.² That is why narrative was the site of real history, why it acted as the standard for history and our understanding of history. For precritical understanding, the Bible tells us what really happened; it is our primary access to that happening. For the critical reader, however, the Bible is a reflection or description of what happened, but it is only one of many possible kinds of access to what happened. Since the figuration of precritical history is its meaning, according to Walter Brueggemann,

"the outcome of historical criticism is most often to provide a text that is palatable to modern rationality, but that in the process has been emptied of much that is most interesting, most poignant, and most 'disclosing' [most "truth-telling"] in the text" (58).

To sum up, this shift from the precritical to the critical marks a radical shift in the understanding of scriptural meaning: the text had been the standard for deciding the reliability of our understanding of the event. That is why precritical thinkers understood the Bible narrative as literal history: it told us what history was; it didn't just describe that history.³ Critical histories, therefore, because they focus on description, will fail as approaches to precritical scriptural texts.

POSTMODERNISM

Knowledge is essentially perspectival. But it doesn't follow that whatever I believe to be true is true or that nothing is true.

NARRATIVE theologians such as Walter Brueggemann⁴ have taken up Frei's work, and they have asked what it would mean for us to understand scriptural texts not critically, but as narrative. To Frei's concern, Brueggemann, like others, has added an interest in "postmodernism," which should not be surprising, given the anti-modernist stance of Frei's work. Brueggemann agrees with Frei that contemporary scriptural interpretation—whether liberal or conservative—is very much a modernist matter. It is "interpretation informed by historical criticism" (1). In other words, interpretation requires one to use the methods of historical science. Modernism is marked by several things,⁵ but particularly important to those interested in scriptural interpretation is modernism's understanding of knowledge. For modernists, knowledge is mathematical or quasi-mathematical certainty, and we get certainty by using a method. (René Descartes is the exemplar here. See his "Discourse on Method and Meditations.") To be a science is to have a method for achieving certainty. Using the work of Stephen Toulmin, Brueggemann points out that modernism can be described as moving the location of knowledge from the oral to the written, from the particular to

the universal, from the local to the general, and from the timely to the timeless—with the quest for certainty at its heart (5).

In the late twentieth century, we have seen much discussion of postmodernism in academic circles, and much of that discussion has been ill-informed and merely trendy, speaking as if we could exorcise the supposed demons of modernism by chanting postmodern mantras against such bogeymen as "totalizing." In spite of the silliness of much of that discussion,⁶ an important point lurks behind it. In Brueggemann's and Toulmin's terms, in the late twentieth century, we see what appears to be a reversal of the movement of modernism, a relocation of knowledge in the oral more than the written, in the particular more than the universal, in the local more than the general, in the timely more than the timeless, and so on.⁷ Brueggemann wants us to think about what such a reversal—or, better, reversing—of modernism (in which it is implicit that the historical method will not do for understanding scripture) could mean for scriptural interpretation.

Brueggemann spends most of his book explaining the theoretical background for the alternative he would like us to consider. Besides Toulmin, he relies on the work of philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi, as well as those more frequently thought of as postmodern thinkers (such as Jean-François Lyotard). Brueggemann argues three points: (1) knowledge is necessarily contextual; (2) contexts are local—to move to a generalization is to move away from context; and (3) knowledge is, therefore, pluralistic (8–9).

To insist on the contextual character of knowledge is directly to attack modernism's demand for acontextual knowledge. However, contra the usual criticism of postmodernism, we must notice that to insist on the contextual character of knowledge is not the same as to insist on relativism (at least not as relativism is most often thought of). Following Nietzsche, postmodern thinkers argue that knowledge is essentially perspectival. It does not, however, follow that whatever I believe to be true is true or (which is the same) that nothing is true. Consider an analogy: I stand on one side of a vase and an-

other person stands on the other. Necessarily, to see the vase is to see it from a perspective. But it doesn't follow that I can describe the vase in any way I want. There are constraints on what I can truthfully say about it, even from my perspective—among other things, the vase constrains me.⁸ As Brueggemann says, the point is that "the world is perceived, processed, and articulated with one or another perspective, and a perspective has the power to make sense out of the rawness of experienced life" (11). In fact, on this view, one cannot make sense of experience *apart from* perspective. To do so would be like insisting that I know a vase only when I can see it, impossibly, from every possible point of view.⁹

Besides taking seriously the idea that knowledge is contextual, much of Brueggemann's theoretical alternative is founded, though indirectly, on Edmund Husserl's related insight that understanding is always understanding *as*. Contrary to our common description of perception, when I see a chair, I don't see a group of colors and shapes and then make a judgment that, collectively, these are a chair. Rather, I simply see a chair in the first place. To see is always to see something or other—in this case, a chair. It is to see "as." The contemporary American philosopher, Wilfred Sellars, makes a similar point: to see red is to "see redly." When I read, I read a text as a particular kind of text, with a particular kind of

meaning. Even to read a text that I find difficult to understand is to read it as one kind of text rather than another. In fact, to understand it as a text rather than a chair or vase is already an interpretive act. Contrary to modernism's assumption, understanding is not added to observation, which is pure or objective. Instead, to observe something is, from the first and necessarily, to understand it in some way or another, to take it as something.¹⁰

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

The point of scripture is to subvert the dominant world culture and offer an alternative world.

OUR lives and social relationships are made possible and significant and effective—in other words, they are structured—by the stories, ordinances, procedures, practices, signs, habits, and so on that create the shape, nuance, and possibility of our lives (27). Much of the "as-structure" of experience comes from the shape given life by these stories, ordinances, procedures, practices, signs, and habits. To a large degree, I see the world as it is given to me by my society. Brueggemann's thesis is that we find in scripture reading "a counter-'as' to the long accepted 'as' that is widely and uncritically accepted as objectively real" (and that, presumably, often goes under the name, "Christianity") (15). What we yearn for and

need is "not new doctrine or new morality, but new world, new self, new future" (25). By opening the possibility of different stories, ordinances, and habits, scripture opens up the possibility of different lives. The problem is that Christians—including Christian leaders and interpreters of scripture—often rely without thinking on the dominant cultural stories, habits, and so on. That is not so much a criticism as it is a fact of life. We live in the world and, because we do, we also live of the world. We condemn this or that aspect of our culture because what we condemn goes against our religious beliefs. In doing so, we have difficulty seeing that, most often, the culture within which we live—and not Christianity itself—gives the framework within which we see and understand the possibilities for life that we take up or reject (27). Even in our religious lives we are often shaped by nonreligious forces, forces perhaps even antithetical to our religious lives. Even our criticisms of the culture are usually made from within the framework of that culture; culture gives us the alternatives between which we choose. The scriptures are to call us to repentance, to life in Jesus Christ; if I put that in the jargon of contemporary philosophy I would say that the point of Christian scripture reading and faithful preaching is to disrupt the apparently seamless continuity of the dominant culture (whatever it is) and to offer the possibility of a gospel culture. The point of scripture study and preaching is to make possible an alternative to "the world." Coming to us through scripture, preaching, and (for Latter-day Saints) continuing revelation, the gospel is the good news that we *can* live differently. In spite of the ideological problems that may remain within the Bible because it was written by human beings, it has the power to radically reconstrue and recontextualize reality and, therefore, our lives. To be a Christian is to believe that conversion, not just rearrangement, is possible.

For Brueggemann, as for Frei, it follows that we should not treat scriptural texts as scientific history. In fact, there is a very real sense in which we cannot do so and still treat them as scripture. This does *not* mean that the scriptures are not history, real history. The argument is that scientific history is not the only kind of history nor even necessarily the best. We have seen that scientific history is written from within a world view that assumes that texts are representative and that one important question to ask about them is, "How accurate are the representations they make?" However, scripture claims to be not representative, but presen-



What one says about divine matters must include the recognition that to speak and write about God and godly things rather than about oneself and one's own or the community's imagination is to speak and write only within a space opened and made possible by those who have divine authority.

tative.¹¹ The scriptures give us a temporal reality—a history—by which we can know and judge the world itself as well as particular representations of the world. They claim to be an original presentation of reality, not a more or less accurate representation of an independently existing reality. Scripture and scientific history are, therefore, not just two different views about the world; they are mutually exclusive views. If scripture gives us the world the way it is, then scientific history—whether conservative, fundamentalist creationism, or “liberal” historical criticism—is relatively useless to us interpretively.

Given that scripture is a “counter-‘as’” to the perspectives we take up in the normal course of events, the point of scripture reading is the subversion of those normal perspectives. The job of the teacher is to open scripture in such a way that it can subvert “normal”—in Christian terms, *worldly*—understanding. But the teacher must do so without having decided in advance just how that subversion will take place or what insights she and her audience will gain from it. She cannot assume that she already knows what is to be learned. The preacher or teacher faces the problem of making it possible for scripture to do its work without simply forcing his or her perspectives onto the scriptures and the audience.¹² Thus, Brueggemann describes the process of scriptural interpretation (though not its ontological status) as analogous to the process of Freudian psychotherapy¹³: (1) Like therapeutic talk, insightful talk about scripture “depends on going underneath the visible structures . . . to the little, specific details that hold power over us.” (2) Like the therapist, “the pastor does not see or know everything in advance, but lives patiently and faithfully while the new pieces of disclosure surface and do their work.” And (3), we are most often settled into orthodoxies of our society and culture, such as “a thin suburban morality of competence and success” or “an orthodoxy of liberal social causes.” In the face of that self-comfort, the scriptures can “trigger an insight, a connection, an illumination that heals” by breaking us out of our comfort and showing us the world differently (21–22; 59–60).

I have some nits to pick with Brueggemann’s characterization of the theory that underlies the approach he recommends. For example, in discussing the “as-function” of understanding, he neglects the fact that things are considerably more complicated than he portrays them. After all, “seeing-as” is seeing both universally and locally, not just locally. To understand knowledge in terms of *as* is to subvert with perspectival knowledge the modernist claim that the goal of knowledge is universality. But it is *not* to subvert universal knowledge *per se*, where *universal* doesn’t mean “aperspectival,” but does mean “shareable”—transcendental, though not transcendent (to use Kant’s terms). The word *universal* does not mean the same as *acontextual*, though we, like the Enlightenment, often assume that it does. I also think that Brueggemann’s insistence on the inability of any viewpoint to claim privilege subtly contradicts his insistence on the power of Christianity to engage us and make demands on us. He recognizes that agreement is not merely a matter of convention, but he fails to deal with the problem of possibly radically different perspectival claims and the power of some claims to outweigh others. In spite of these nits, I generally agree with Brueggemann’s intentions and his arguments.

LDS IMPLICATIONS

We need authority without authoritarianism to create any space for religious discourse.

FOR a Latter-day Saint, however, Brueggemann misses one important question—the question of authority in interpretation. Brueggemann has ignored the question of what authorizes interpretations. For him, there is little question. He is, after all, a Protestant. In that, he continues to be committed to the Enlightenment, which has as one of its hallmarks the rejection of any authority but that of “Reason.”¹⁴ But Latter-day Saint understanding seeks a way between the potential anarchy of the Protestant insistence on the individual and her autonomy, and the potential authoritarianism of Catholicism—something that, as Doctrine and Covenants 121 reminds us, al-

ways (perhaps necessarily) threatens those who have authority. The problem of authority has several dimensions: First, if there is no authority, then how do we decide between conflicting interpretations? We may want a manifold of interpretations. I think we should “let a thousand flowers bloom.” However, even if we allow and encourage a manifold of interpretations, not *every* interpretation is possible. Alma 32 is not a recipe for pound cake. How do we avoid the private, or in other words, merely individual, interpretation that scripture tells us is impossible? (See 2 Pet. 1:20.) Second, whatever our answer to the first question, how do we avoid making scriptural interpretation merely a matter of psychological or emotional response? In other words, how do we avoid making our interpretations nothing more than, as Feuerbach described religion, a projection of human desires and needs, whether individual or collective? We might avoid private interpretation by allowing the community and its tradition to authorize interpretations, but that would not remove the possibility that our interpretations were still *only* a matter of wish-fulfillment, the expression of the community’s consciousness and historical development (rather than the individual’s). In that case, we would have only the kind of authority that was rightly rejected by the Enlightenment. The question is, how do we avoid falling into the trap of individual authority, or in other words, anarchy, on the one hand, or nothing but traditional authority with its tendency toward oppression, on the other?

The contemporary Catholic thinker Jean-Luc Marion argues that to be religious is to believe that—at some level—one’s experience comes from beyond the individual and the community, from the Person outside this world.¹⁵ Marion argues that in order to distinguish between that which God has to say to us and that which we attribute to God (whether as individuals or as communities) there must be unspeakable, *divine* authority. The interpretations we offer, just as the ordinances we perform, can escape the possibility that they are nothing more than expressions of individual or communal consciousness only if they recognize and incorporate the authority that makes them

possible. That is not to say that one can say only what one is told to say by a priesthood authority. To take that position would substitute authoritarianism for authority. But neither is it to leave interpretation up to the individual. To say that interpretations must recognize the authority that authorizes them is to say that what one says about divine matters must include the recognition that to speak and write about God and godly things rather than about oneself and one's own or the community's imagination is to speak and write only within a space opened and made possible by those who have divine authority, those through whom God speaks.¹⁶ One can disagree with the bishop, stake president, or members of the Twelve, but unless such disagreements occur within the space that is "authorized" (created) by the Divine, within the space opened by those with divine authority acting in that authority, then they are simple rebellion. Without minimizing the fact that those who are appointed as priesthood authorities can abuse divine authority, quickly and easily substituting their will and imagination for that of God, I agree with Marion that interpretation of scripture, as all theology, demands holiness, and holiness demands authority that comes not only from beyond oneself, but also from beyond one's community and tradition.¹⁷ To use philosophical jargon again, authority must come from the Other, from beyond context and culture. To recognize that is to recognize the proper place and importance of authority.

APPLICATIONS

How to read scripture to open up a place of vision and memory/covenant/hope.

MY final criticism of Brueggemann's book is that while it gives an interesting and accessible discussion of the possibility of a new way of looking at scripture, it gives us too little by way of practical application. Taking a cue from Martin Heidegger, Brueggemann focuses the scrip-

tural studies in his book on the question of time. Unlike the Enlightenment and rationalist view, for Christians, the world is not just the present world, for which the past is something to overcome and the future is to be brought into the present as quickly as possible by the maximization of technology. For Christians, the past and the future are ontologically crucial to the present, not adjunct: the origin of life is divine, and that divine origin (the past) must constantly be remembered; the point of life is consummation with God, and that consummation (future) must always be anticipated and hoped for (28). Technologism and consumerism—the reigning bastard children of the Enlightenment—banish both creation and consummation by reducing them only to manifestations of the present. As Book of Mormon writers make clear, memory and anticipation are necessary to Christian understanding. Consider that speakers in the Book of Mormon most commonly begin their sermons by remembering. They may recall Moses and Israel (e.g., 1 Ne. 17:23 ff.) or Lehi (e.g., Alma 9:7 ff.), but memory is an explicit part of their preaching and teaching. Similarly, it is impossible to avoid the degree to which Book of Mormon sermons are matters of hope and anticipation.

Brueggemann also argues that, contra modernism, Christians do not simply understand the present as the "now" point. Instead, the present is "a readiness to receive life from the other, from God and neighbor, rather than from self" (54). It is the moment—the movement—of fidelity to the covenant that one takes on from God and the neighbor. Though for modernism the past and future are ordered by the "now" (we must make the past now to understand it or for it to have effect—the future is what comes out of that which we do now), for the Christian the "now" is ordered by Christian memory and hope. We and the world are figured by memory and hope, and thus, so are our scriptural texts.

This figuration by memory and hope is what makes the distinction between mere authoritarianism and genuine authority possible. Genuine authority is to be found not in pronouncements or pronouncers as such, but in the ordinances that come to us as gifts, bringing together Christian memory and hope in the space of faith and covenant. "Authorized" space—according to the Latin root, the space provided, the space of increase and advancement—is the space opened from beyond culture by the appearance in culture of ordinance. Pronouncements and those who pronounce get their authority from and within ordinance; ordinance is authority, the gift of increase from the Divine.¹⁸ Ordinance provides order, not the reverse.

Continuing to differentiate the Christian perspective from that of the Enlightenment and its contemporary heirs by looking carefully and imaginatively at passages of scripture, Brueggemann shows that Christian memory does not serve to *explain* the past. Thus, the Judeo-Christian memory of creation is incomparable with scientific memories of the earth's origins. The scientific account serves to explain why the world presently is as it is, given particular methodological parameters. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian account is a response to our existence: "It pushes the reason for one's existence out beyond one's self to find that reason in an inexplicable, inscrutable, loving generosity that redefines all our modes of reasonableness" (29). Similarly, the Christian vision of the future affirms that, in its very being, the world is not finished, that we have charitable work to do, and that the Christian vision of the present is the vision of a world in which we are lovingly covenanted to all others—ontologically obligated.

Brueggemann gives several suggestions for reading scriptures to allow them to open a vision and place of memory/covenant/hope. Focusing on the "little story" rather than the big picture, he tells us: (1) don't

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worry about creating a systematic theology; (2) we may have to ignore or even "violate much we have learned in historical criticism" (58); (3) we should read in a "Jewish" rather than Hellenistic way—in other words, we should read to honor "the ambiguity, complexity, and affront of the text without too much worry about making it palatable" (59); and (4) as mentioned, we should understand scriptural exegesis in an analogy to Freudian psychotherapeutic techniques.¹⁹ Brueggemann also suggests that we think of scripture as the text for a drama that we must act out in concert with others.

I believe that Brueggemann's third suggestion encompasses the rest. More successfully than has its Christian counterparts, Jewish scriptural interpretation has avoided falling into the traps laid for us by modernism. It isn't concerned particularly about systematic theology, it often ignores or violates critical history without embarrassment, it looks for unapparent meanings, and it is very much a part of living a religious life with others. For many Jews, Torah (including Talmud) remains the expression of what the world is

and how it should be seen rather than an objective or, alternatively, metaphoric description of what things there are. Thus, I suggest that a revised version of four rules for Talmudic interpretation may help us do what Brueggemann proposes better than do his suggestions:

1. The statements of the scriptural texts are *the* source material in the search for divine truth.²⁰
2. We must assume that scripture means exactly what it says, and, even more important, we must assume that we do not already know what it says.
3. We must focus on the differences between scriptural texts as well as on the similarities, looking to see what those differences teach us.
4. To avoid remaining locked into our pre-given understandings and interpretations, we must assume that each aspect of the text is significant and ask about that significance.

My suggestions, like Brueggemann's, remain general, however. Though followed by the interpretation of several, short scriptural

studies, readings²¹ that help us think about the past as memory, the future as anticipation, and the present as covenantal fidelity, Brueggemann's suggestions for how to read scripture are insufficient. Presumably, one can see what he is doing in these interpretations. But I would like to have seen more interpretations so I would know better how to imitate such reading myself. In the end, Brueggemann tantalizes us with an introduction to the philosophical justification for his alternative approach to scripture,²² and he provides a morsel or two of that alternative, but he should have also given us a book devoted to the interpretations themselves. Perhaps that follows in the future; at least we can hope for it. ☞

NOTES

1. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

2. Of course, this does not mean that ancient writers could not distinguish between fiction and history. The point is that, for biblical writers, figuration was as much a part of history—as essential to it—as it was a part of and essential to fiction. Figuration did not distinguish history from fiction.

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precritical and critical understanding of biblical discourse is that for precritical readers the interpreter was important. Precritically, it was not thought true that everyone had equal access, through reason, to understanding the text. That is an Enlightenment idea, identical with the notion that all persons are equally endowed with natural reason, a notion that had praiseworthy, liberating effects as well as abominable, oppressive ones. Colonialism and imperialism were very much justified by that notion and the concomitant observation that not everyone thought the way that Europeans did. Without going any further down that tangential road, let it suffice to say that for precritical readers, truthful understanding of biblical history required a faithful interpreter. As the Enlightenment was well aware, that also had its oppressive effects, often noted in the refusal of the church to let any but the educated clergy read or interpret the Bible. It is not clear, however, that we understand precritical understandings of interpretation if we reduce them to their oppressive uses. And making such a reduction tends to be part of excusing our own interpretive imperialsms.

4. In addition to Brueggemann, those writing about narrative theology include T. Altizer, R. M. Brown, S. Hauerwas, F. Kerr, N. Lash, A. Louth, J. Navone, and perhaps S. Handelman. Though not herself a narrative theologian, E. Wyschogrod does related, interesting work in *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*. There she argues that we understand what it means to be moral via narratives rather than through sets of moral rules, and she presents arguments against the usual ways that academics and, consequently, others deal with ethical and moral questions. The arguments she makes for her position and against those of others are, by analogy, useful in this discussion as well as interesting in their own right.

5. Stephen Daniel gives a helpful description of modernism:

The designation "modern" does not refer to a period in history as much as to a constellation of positions (e.g., a rational demand for unity, certainty, universality, and ultimacy) and beliefs (e.g., the belief that words, ideas, and things are distinct entities; the belief that the world represents a fixed object of analysis separate from forms of human discourse and cognitive representations; the belief that culture is subsequent to nature and that society is subsequent to the individual). ("Paramodern Strategies of Philosophical Historiography," *Epoché* 1.1 [fall 1994], 41-63.)

6. But it must also be noted that most of the attacks on postmodernism have been equally silly, attacking straw soldiers, or dealing with postmodernism's serious questions about modernism and objectivity by pretending that those questions can simply be ignored.

7. Some who talk about postmodernism, deconstructionism, etc., speak as if we are at the dawn of a new age (and much trendy postmodernism is difficult to distinguish from other New Age silliness). Oddly enough, in doing so, they make a distinctly modernist move: they announce the dawn or rebirth of real knowledge and learning. Many so-called postmodernists are hardly less enthusiastic or confident than were the first Westerners to condemn the supposed evil and ignorance of their own (medieval) past, namely the initiators of modernism, of the Renaissance. As J.-L. Marion says, "He [sic] who pretends to go beyond a metaphysics must produce thereby another thought. And he who pretends to go beyond all metaphysics most often risks taking up again, without being conscious of it, its basic characteristic" (*God without Being*, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991] 165).

Brueggemann is more careful and responsible than those who blindly repeat modernism in criticizing it. He recognizes that even thoughtful postmodernism may, as J. Habermas has argued, actually be only a move within modernism (2). He is not concerned to show us the glory that lies before us or to reject the past. He wants us to consider an alternative way of thinking about scriptural interpretation.

The questioning of modernism (and it is important to remember that to question is not necessarily to reject) gives us reason to consider alternatives for interpretation, but there is an additional reason to do so, one that should appeal to Latter-day Saints. Brueggemann quotes L. Gilkey: "A good case can be made that the spiritual substance of the Enlightenment took its shape against the Hebrew and the Christian myths or salvation history" (7). In other words, modernism's various emphases and its untempered rejection of authority were, in large part, a rejection of the insights and understandings of biblical religion. It was, after all, the moderns who called the previous eras of Christian learning and understanding the "Dark Ages" and meant by that little more than "not us."

8. Some contemporary thinkers have been concerned about how the image of knowledge as sight influences our understanding. Levinas, for example, argues that the image tends toward a kind of egoism. Though I understand the concern and to

some degree share it, we can leave that worry aside for our present purposes.

9. The LDS doctrine of God's embodiment has interesting implications for this discussion, since embodiment necessarily implies a perspective. Modernism wants humans to have the view that had previously been supposed to be the view of God, the "view" from every perspective. It would be fruitful to pursue the question of what implications the belief in God's embodiment has for our understanding of divine knowledge.

10. One way to make the point is to say that we must not confuse perception with physiology. Our common description of perception may say something about the physiology of perception, but it says nothing about perception itself, unless we beg the question and reduce perception to physiology. What happens in the experience of seeing is not the same thing as what happens to my body when I see.

11. This view shares with Marxist, feminist, African American, and other views critical of the status quo, the understanding that modernism's objectivity is no less presentative than is any other understanding of the world. But modernism hides its presentative character behind the veil of objectivity, behind its claim to be merely representative. Objectivity presents a particular way of understanding the world—not necessarily a way that should be rejected outright, but certainly not a way of representing that stands apart from the values, ideologies, political motivations, and social situations of the person or persons making the supposed re-presentation. Objectivity, though not useless, dissimulates its presentative character.

12. This problem of criticizing that within which one stands is at the origin of deconstruction: We want to talk about our tradition or a text within that tradition, we even want to criticize it. But we have no standpoint from which to do so but the tradition itself. We must, therefore, find a way of using the tradition or text against itself. (For an early, helpful description of deconstruction, see Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982], 19-23.) For people like Brueggemann, scripture provides such a lever: it is within the tradition and so can always be completely accommodated to or appropriated by it. But scripture also offers the possibility of doing and saying more than the tradition; it offers an "alternative" to the tradition from within the tradition.

13. I think it more accurate to think of Freudian psychotherapy as resembling scriptural interpretation. It is conceivable that Freud's Jewish heritage expresses itself in such a connection.

14. The criticisms of the Enlightenment's rejection of au-

thority are numerous. The most general form in which the criticism can be put is, perhaps, this: those who criticize authority fail to recognize that they necessarily rely on something else as an authority, something that remains hidden to them and, therefore, that exercises far more authority over them than would any recognized authority. For an excellent discussion of the problem with the Enlightenment's rejection of authority—but a discussion that does not leave us only mindlessly to obey whomever has been placed over us—see Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 271-85; and (as a corrective to common misinterpretations of Gadamer as an advocate of the status quo) Gerald Bruns, "Structuralism, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics," in *Diacritics* 14 (1984): 12-23.

15. Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being* (Chicago University Press, 1991), 153ff.

16. To be fair to Brueggemann and Protestantism, I should note that he would probably say that the inspired individual is the one through whom God speaks, and that individual access to inspiration is the source of authority. However, with Catholics, Latter-day Saints believe there is more to authority than that, though neither believes that we can ignore the possibility of individual inspiration. The authority of inspiration is necessary, but not sufficient.

17. In fact, I think abuses of priesthood power are so serious because—at precisely the place where one is obligated to recognize the divine and a power greater than one's own—abuse of priesthood power substitutes the will of the person for the will of God. Those who abuse priesthood power and those who rebel against it are of a kind: each puts his or her will in place of the will of God. Abusers and rebels alike substitute receiving God's will for wreaking their own.

18. See Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, 170ff.

19. Since figural interpretation is perhaps the oldest form of interpretation, this comparison of scripture reading to psychotherapy may strike some as at least anachronistic. I take it that Brueggemann's comparison is a heuristic device for readers who may be more likely to understand psychotherapeutic techniques than figural interpretation.

20. I include what comes through continuing revelation as scriptural text.

21. Readings of Exodus 11:19, Deuteronomy 15:1-11, 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Jeremiah 4:23-26, Isaiah 55:1-3, and Proverbs 15:17.

22. Whether on his own principles such a justification should be necessary is another question. It seems, however, at least heuristically necessary in the present situation.



OPHIR AND EUREKA

The wood was still smoking when I walked by,
 Though whoever spent the night had absconded.
 Some sort of arbitrary dumpsite, sagebrush and cedar
 Latticed by human-sign: bedsprings, paint buckets,
 And a woman's shoe—one the Seventies called
 Earth shoe, the leather still whole but stiff
 With decades of fire and ice—further from the road
 Dwindling to hair ribbons, green bottle shards, rings
 Of campfire rocks. From the ridge
 It might have been a moonscape, astronaut droppings
 In dune buggy ruts, left an eon ago on museum display.
 Still the grass was pushing through, the rabbits
 Claimed the tractor tires against the hawks:
 And though from here it looked the worse for wear,
 God, it seemed, was none the wiser.

—C. WADE BENTLEY

RECENTLY RELEASED

Compiled by Will Quist

This section features recent titles of Mormon interest; the descriptions are often taken from promotional materials. No endorsement is implied. Submissions are welcome, especially books of Mormon interest not by major LDS publishers.

Note: For future columns, we would like information about non-English Mormon books.

BIOGRAPHY

African Dragons. Hermine B. Horman. Hawkes Publishing, pb, 277 p., \$13.95.

The "provocative and stimulating account of experiences she and her husband" shared on their mission to the Ivory Coast.

The Autobiography of Elder Helvécio Martins. Helvécio Martins with Mark Grover. Aspen Books, hb, 131 p., \$12.95.

"A simple, inspiring account of unwavering faith" from street life in Rio de Janeiro to a calling as the first black general authority.

Each One a Miracle. Ed. DeAnna Ballard and Terry Ball. Grandin Book, hb, 172 p., \$10.95.

"The stories of eleven LDS couples who bring light into the world of" Romanian orphans.

One Man's Journey in Search of Freedom. Obert C. Tanner. University of Utah Press, hb, 241 p., \$14.95.

An "engaging volume of autobiographical reminiscences [from] this unorthodox, interesting, and complex man."

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Christ-Centered Living. Robert L. Millet. Bookcraft, hb, 156 p., \$12.95.

"How, by . . . centering one's life in Christ, the 'ordinary' Church member can come to experience the joy of true Christian living."

Families. Deseret Book, hb, 155 p., \$13.95.

"General Authorities and general officers . . . [on] how to create and nurture homes that are truly a refuge from the evils of the world."

The Sanctity of Dissent. Paul Toscano. Signature Books, hb, 184 p., \$15.95.

Ten speeches (with doctrinal overtones) arguing for changes that will make "an open, compassionate, and forgiving religious community."

Teaching Like the Master: Getting beyond Techniques. D. Cecil Clark. Covenant Communications, pb, 158 p., \$8.95.

"You'll find counsel and inspiration on every page [to] help you become an effective teacher and . . . truly influence lives for good."

10 Critical Keys for Highly Effective Mormon Families. William G. Dyer and Phillip R. Kunz. Cedar Fort, pb, 205 p., \$9.95.

"It is remarkable that there is so much consensus" among "insights from 200 successful Latter-day Saint families."

That We Might Have Joy. Howard W. Hunter. Deseret Book, hb, 197 p., \$14.95.

These thirty-two talks show "how using the Savior's life and teachings as our guide can lead to greater peace of mind and joy."

Three Steps to a Strong Family. Linda Eyre and Richard Eyre. Simon and Schuster, hb, 235 p., \$19.50.

These bestselling LDS authors and their nine children discuss family laws, economics, and traditions.

Topical Guide to LDS and Related Videos. Sterling H. Redd. Northwest Publishing, pb, 189 p., \$9.95.

"Dedicated to all parents and leaders concerned regarding . . . home solidarity, personal growth, and character development."

HISTORY

The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays. Davis Bitton. University of Illinois Press, hb, 194 p., \$25.95.

Poetry and polygamy, B. H. Roberts and Brigham Young Jr., rituals and rowdies, dancing, spiritualism, and lifestyles.

Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900. Dean L. May. Cambridge University Press, hb, 313 p., \$44.95.

"Compares rural people who settled in the Willamette Valley in the 1840s, the Utah Valley in the 1850s, and the Boise Valley in the 1860s."

SCRIPTURE

Angular Chronology: Precolumbian Dating of Ancient America. Michael M. Hobby, June M. Hobby, and Troy J. Smith. Zarahemla Foundation, pb, 81 p., \$6.95.

About "a breakthrough in Precolumbian dating based upon the discovery of a change in the cardinal directions."

Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical Criticism of LDS Theology. Richard R. Hopkins. Horizon Publishers, 285 p., \$18.98.

Shows that LDS teachings are "true biblical Christianity" and that many accepted Christian teachings "are neither biblical nor Christian."

The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, from Zion to Destruction. Ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. BYU Religious Studies Center, hb, 374 p., \$12.95.

Twenty-five papers from the annual BYU Book of Mormon Symposium on "doctrinal and historical issues [and] the modern applications."

In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful. Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston. Deseret Book, hb, 88 p., \$15.95.

The Astons provide "a wealth of new data and insights about the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon."

Unto Us a Child Is Born. W. Jeffrey Marsh. Bookcraft, hb, 184 p., \$10.95.

Scriptures and commentary are presented "so that the Christmas story may be experienced as it unfolded anciently."

THEOLOGY

Multiply and Replenish: Mormon Essays on Sex and Family. Ed. Brent Corcoran. Signature Books, pb, 273 p., \$18.95.

Transitions from 19th-century nonconformity to 20th-century respectability, as well as "contemporary dichotomies between belief and practice, public and private views."

Passage to Light: General Authorities Offer Consolation on Death and Dying. Comp. C. Douglas Beardall and Jewel N. Beardall. LDS Book Publications, pb, 245 p., \$9.95.

Help for the the "pain, suffering, and sorrow [of] the loss of a family member or a friend."

Reincarnation: Origins and Theories. Ogden Kraut. Pioneer Press, pb, 199 p., \$6.00.

"A believer in the fullness of the Gospel" responds to "published and unpublished views on the subject."

Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism. Ed. Donald W. Parry. F.A.R.M.S., hb, 805 p., \$29.95.

Sixteen scholars on temples and related topics: modern and ancient; Judaism; covenant, law, and kingship; sacred clothing.

We Believe: Doctrines and Principles of the Church . . . Rulon T. Burton. Tabernacle Books, large hb, 1,194 p., \$39.95.

"For the first time a comprehensive reference work attempts to answer the question, what do Mormons believe, in an accessible and authoritative manner."