



Q & A

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Reading Scripture as the Church *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutic of Discipleship*

Available September 22, 2020 | \$40, 290 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4918-5

Bonhoeffer's Hermeneutical Challenge

What is your main thesis in *Reading Scripture as the Church*?

Derek W. Taylor: Recent accounts of the “theological interpretation of Scripture” unanimously agree that the church is the agent and location of faithful interpretation. But I’m asking, which church reads Scripture faithfully? I propose a constructive answer to this question. I use Dietrich Bonhoeffer, particularly his discipleship motif, to sketch an ecclesial hermeneutic of discipleship.

What are your reasons for critiquing the “theological interpretation of Scripture” movement?

Derek: First, I worry that the attempt to be self-consciously ecclesial in our interpretive method can unwittingly limit the voice of the text. The attempt to read “in the church” always assumes a particular vision of what the church is, and I’ve found that this can often limit our ability to hear important voices that might fall on the margins of the church—or even beyond it.

Second, I worry that contemporary conversations about biblical interpretation too frequently imply that interpretation happens *in* the church before the church then (if at all) moves *out* into the world. I worry, in other words, that many proponents of theological interpretation rely upon an inflated account of ecclesial boundaries. Without proper qualification, this interpretive posture can breed insularity. It comes as no surprise, then, that the practice of ecclesial interpretation often comes across as distinctly Western, nonmissional, and nonliberative. I consider this a grave shortcoming. I thus contend that in order to live up to its name, ecclesial hermeneutics needs a richer ecclesiology.

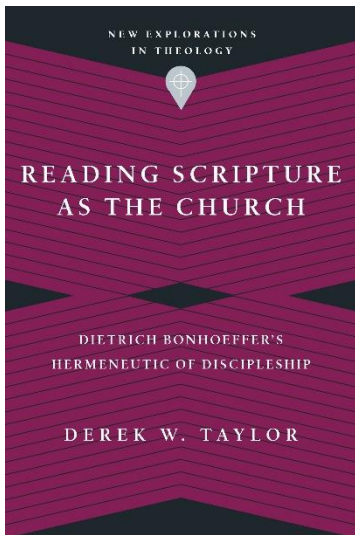
Finally, I worry that conversations about biblical interpretation too often render discipleship hermeneutically inconsequential. In most churches and classrooms, the task of understanding Scripture is divorced (both theoretically and practically) from the ongoing process of following Jesus. At best, discipleship becomes the outcome of interpretation done well. But this fundamentally distorts the nature of Christian life and thought. I contend that Scripture depicts the act of following Jesus as integral to the process of understanding. For Christian theology, the hermeneutical question always presupposes a life of discipleship. Indeed, discipleship is itself prolegomena to all theological endeavors, not least to the task of understanding Scripture. A host of practical implications follow from this realization. Perhaps most importantly, it reminds us that hermeneutics is a matter of the body and not merely the mind, a matter of the community and not merely the individual, and an ongoing journey rather than a moment of illumination. If interpretation is in fact a theological activity, then who we are is more hermeneutically fundamental than how we read. While certain proponents of theological interpretation have made important gestures in this direction, the possibility must be explored with more theological energy.



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What do you hope your book contributes to the study of theology and scriptural interpretation?

Derek:

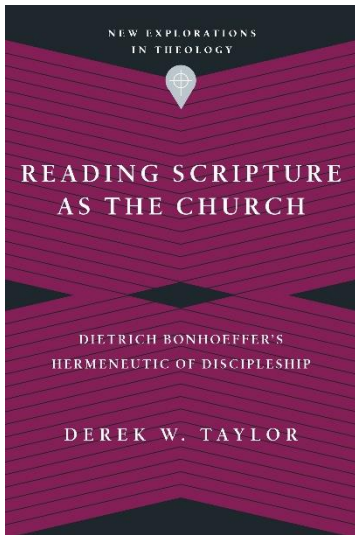
- My book contributes to the growing body of literature surrounding the “theological interpretation of Scripture.” It does so by adding theological depth and clarity to these conversations. While proponents of theological interpretation have almost unanimously assumed that the church is the context and agent of faithful interpretation, rarely have we paused to ask what we mean by *church*. My book asks the ecclesiological question—What is the church?—in order to answer the hermeneutical question—How do we read well in the church? In so doing, I am able to make a more specific critical contribution. I worry that the image of the church operative in many accounts of theological interpretation functions with an inflated sense of ecclesial boundaries and, therefore, that proponents of theological interpretation are overly invested in guarding a particular ecclesial culture. This means that ecclesial interpretation tends to come across as one-sidedly Western, nonmissional, and nonliberative. I take this to be a shortcoming of the movement that Bonhoeffer’s discipleship motif helps remedy.
- My book contributes to the growing body of Bonhoeffer scholarship. Given the centrality of Scripture in Bonhoeffer’s theological imagination, a disproportionately small amount of scholarly attention has been paid to it. My book surveys the entire scope of Bonhoeffer’s theological career and makes a compelling case for what I call a hermeneutic of discipleship.
- My book contributes to ongoing discussions about ecclesial practices. A properly theological account of hermeneutical faithfulness is impossible without attention to the actual activities involved in the reading process. Therefore the book makes a constructive claim not only about the theology of Scripture but also about the practices and habits that sustain faithful reading. The turn to practice has been wide ranging in contemporary theology. More often than not, the emphasis on practice emerges from a broadly post-liberal emphasis on the church as a distinct culture. I worry that this downplays the christological elements of the church. Following Bonhoeffer, I attempt to articulate a thick account of the interpretive practices and habits that arise from Christ’s concrete presence.



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DETAILS



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"The New Explorations in Theology series fills an important lacuna in contemporary theological literature, by carving out space for systematic, historical, philosophical, and other constructive monographs on important theological issues, doctrines, and figures for a reasonable cost. These are high-level explorations in theology that deserve close attention by scholars and graduate students of theology."

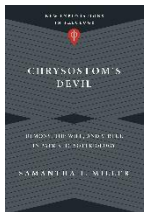
—Kyle Strobel, associate professor of spiritual theology, Biola University

New Explorations in Theology

Theology is flourishing in dynamic and unexpected ways in the twenty-first century. Scholars are increasingly recognizing the global character of the church, freely crossing old academic boundaries, and challenging previously entrenched interpretations. Despite living in a culture of uncertainty, both young and senior scholars today are engaged in hopeful and creative work in the areas of systematic, historical, philosophical, biblical, and practical theology.

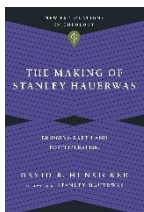
In an age of media proliferation and academic oversaturation, there is a need to single out the best new monographs. IVP Academic is committed to publishing constructive works that advance key theological conversations. We look for projects that investigate new areas of research, stimulate fruitful dialogue, and attend to the diverse array of contexts and audiences in our increasingly pluralistic world. IVP Academic is excited to make this work available to scholars, students, and general readers who are seeking fresh new insights for the future of Christian theology.

In addition to this new release, *Reading Scripture as the Church*, NET titles include:



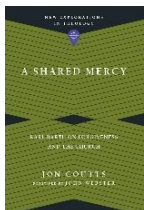
Chrysostom's Devil: Demons, the Will, and Virtue in Patristic Soteriology by Samantha L. Miller
March 17, 2020, 216 pages, 978-0-8308-4917-8

References to demons and the devil permeate the rhetoric of John Chrysostom, the "golden-tongued" early church preacher and theologian. Samantha Miller examines Chrysostom's theology and world, helping us understand the role of demons in his soteriology and exploring what it means to be human and to follow Christ in a world of temptation.



The Making of Stanley Hauerwas: Bridging Barth and Postliberalism by David B. Hunsicker
September 10, 2019, 248 pages, 978-0-8308-4916-1

Stanley Hauerwas is often associated with the postliberal theological movement, yet he also claims to stand within Karl Barth's theological tradition. Which is true? Theologian David Hunsicker offers a reevaluation of Hauerwas's theology, arguing that he is both a postliberal and a Barthian theologian, helping us understand both the formation and the ongoing significance of one of America's great theologians.



A Shared Mercy: Karl Barth on Forgiveness and the Church by Jon Coutts
October 8, 2016, 244 pages, 978-0-8308-4915-4

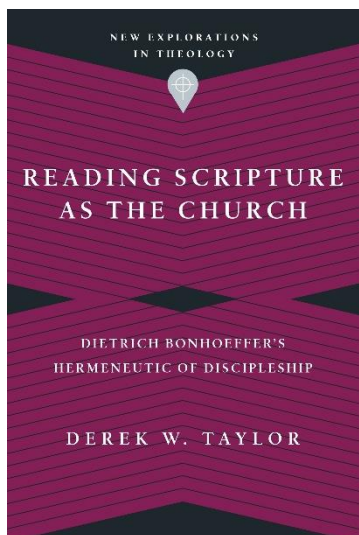
Combining systematic and pastoral theology, Jon Coutts explores what it means to forgive and reconcile in the context of the Christ-confessing community. Both a constructive practical theology and a critical commentary on Barth's theology in *Church Dogmatics*, this work explains the place and meaning of interpersonal forgiveness in Christ's ongoing ministry of reconciliation.



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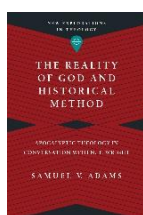


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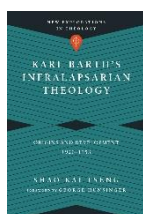
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—Kyle Strobel, associate professor of spiritual theology, Biola University



Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology: Origins and Development, 1920–1953 by Shao Kai Tseng
March 18, 2016, 319 pages, 978-0-8308-5132-4

Scholars of Karl Barth's theology have been unanimous in labeling him a supralapsarian, largely because Barth identifies himself as such. In this groundbreaking and thoroughly researched work, Shao Kai Tseng argues that Barth was actually an infralapsarian, bringing Barth into conversation with recent studies in Puritan theology.



The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with N. T. Wright
by Samuel V. Adams
November 9, 2015, 297 pages, 978-0-8308-4914-7

Samuel Adams engages the classic problem of the relation between faith and history from the perspective of apocalyptic theology in critical dialogue with the work of N. T. Wright. He argues that historical and theological scholars must take into consideration, at a methodological level, the reality of God that has invaded history in Jesus Christ.



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