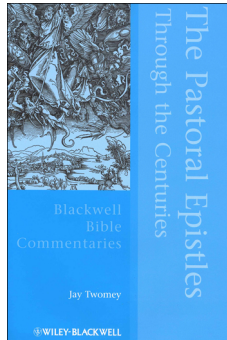


○ REVIEW OF JAY TWOMEY, *THE PASTORAL EPISTLES THROUGH THE CENTURIES*

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This past summer, I was in Washington D.C. and decided to take the opportunity to mark the anniversaries of President Lincoln's birthday and Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon by visits to the Smithsonian museums. The Museum of American History had an extraordinary special exhibit on Lincoln; the Aerospace Museum offered self-guided tours and an entire room devoted to Apollo 11. In all, both exhibits were engrossing and nuanced. The Smithsonian's shift to a multi-facility complex, sorting its vast and arcane holdings into ever-more specific taxonomies, enabled both the depth and the detail of each exhibit. I couldn't help thinking, however, that something was lost in all the clarity. In its former days, stuffed as much of the collection was into a single Victorian era fortress, a trip to the Smithsonian meant moments when one touched a moon rock while looking at Mr. Lincoln's last top hat while standing in the shadow of the Wright Brother's first airplane just next to the brontosaurus. The modern Smithsonian teaches; the former Smithsonian, though, sparked its own, otherworldly sense of wonder and serendipity.

In many ways, modern biblical scholarship – particularly the genre of the commentary, the primary 'storage house' and museum of exegetical possibility – has become increasingly specialised and precisely sorted into taxonomies of methodology, interpretive approach,

and audience. Our field is, in all honesty, the better for it. Big ideas can be expressed with the nuance and precision that only focused collection and citation can produce. As a professor and religious educator, I can select commentary appropriate in its complexity and content for my various courses. I can find series which focus on emphases I wish to focus on. I can select commentaries for students which avoid sexist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic readings. Commentaries are becoming more and more niche driven. The result is criticism and commentary that can often largely assume huge facility with secondary literature, ideology, language skill etc. These assumptions allow authors to hone their critique to unprecedented precision; often, they may argue without need of serious defense. In part, however, this fragmentation has hobbled one of the most powerful forms of education (and arguably the goal of scholarship): in our criticism, we are 'talking' less and less to people with whom we disagree. The result is that some forms of the discovery, irritation, complexity, and, frankly, serendipitous wonder are lost. The new Blackwell Bible Commentaries, with its consistently titled '...Through the Centuries' volumes, has potential to bring some of that messy-but-wonderful criticism back. The series is becoming, in many ways, the Old-Style-Smithsonian of biblical criticism. Authors for this series, if they want that wonderful eclecticism to continue, would do well to review Twomey's contribution on the Pastorals.

The commentary proceeds according to the format of the series – as a phrase-by-phrase commentary on the Pastorals. After a brief introduction that traces, in broadest strokes, questions about author and date (Twomey himself rejects Pauline authorship, though that doesn't really matter given the nature of the comments to come), Twomey begins his treatment of key phrases, following each pericope in canonical order. The verse-by-verse approach does not focus on traditional commentary concerns (philology, lexicography, grammar, context, text etc.), but is instead a survey of the reception history of the passage. This survey follows general highlights and is in no way exhaustive nor comprehensive. It includes comment by historically significant biblical exegetes (Calvin, Origen, Augustine, Barth, Baur etc.) alongside 'non-biblical studies' interpreters and authors (Chaucer, Milton, Nietzsche etc.). Biblical pericopes are summarised, but not presented in translation (causing some awkward 'two-book' negotiations, where an open copy of the Bible and/or a Greek text are perched on the same arm-rest or lap as Twomey's commentary).

For those unfamiliar, the Blackwell Bible Commentaries are one of the series marking a resurgence of interest in historical exegesis/history of exegesis. Like the major series the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (InterVarsity) or The Church's Bible (Eerdmans), the volume actually offers an anthology of comment from historical exegetes

arranged in a verse-by-verse parallel to the biblical text. Like both series, The BBC also focuses on reception history, treating other issues, philology, et al., only as they happen to relate to that history of discourse. Unlike either series, however, the BBC makes no claims on selection for devotional, theological nor ‘consensual’ importance; comments are included because of their intrinsic interest. In addition, the comments themselves, though annotated and summarised (and briefly quoted), are not present. Finally, the comments are not limited to theologians nor exegetes. In this latter sense, the series is quite similar to those which trace the afterlives of biblical characters.

In a major sense, the success or failure of any volume following this format would lie in the ability of the selected comments to generate interest and important reflection in the reader. Twomey's volume is an exemplar of how good selection can do just this. Twomey brings an enviable breadth of reading into his own highly sensitive Bible reading. This eclectic approach to history of commentary still manages, in Twomey's hands, to mark significant moments and shifts in the history of biblical criticism and exegetical method. Yet, even better, it also spills out of the confines of strict biblical studies to show intersections with broader shifts in reading, generically, and the constant variegation of cultural epistemology. Twomey, rightfully, makes absolutely no attempt to discern what an author (biblical or modern) ‘means’ or intends; he surveys what is said, often juxtaposing comments in ways that make the sharp edges sharper and that attenuate the echoes of each into new and interesting resonances and harmonies.

If there is a thesis-arc to Twomey's collection, it is most likely his views regarding the pell-mell nature of criticism on the Pastorals. Twomey catches the tone of many exegetes such as Chrysostom (‘He who questions can not believe’) who use the condemnation of speculation and dissent found in the Pastorals as a bludgeon and the Pastoral's assertions that ‘all Scripture is inspired’ as an anchor. Yet his commentary is, itself, wry testimony to the amazing array of disputes and dissents over the very language of the pastorals, themselves. What makes this array so daunting to any hopes of exegetical stability are twofold: 1. Twomey's arrangement clearly demonstrates that the various shifts in interpretation mirror major cultural and literary shifts on the whole; ‘new’ insights into the Bible's meaning always arise from shifts in cultural epistemology. 2. Most of the variant readings are defensible from the text; more than one ‘story’ can effectively be told. Twomey writes:

As will become evident in this volume, readers of the letters frequently draw upon the Pastor's tendentious presentation of his opponents

either to spar with opponents of their own, or to comment on their own historical moments. (p. 19)

In other words, Twomey's volume clarifies that the meanings we take away from biblical text, most often, are the meanings we bring into the reading of it.

The volume is written for the general reader or biblical scholar interested in comments from further afield than typical modern commentary. This produces, on one hand, a fairly relaxed and readable volume. Yet, at times, it also results in odd moments when what a reader was 'expected' to know seems a bit ambitious. For example, in the comments on 1 Tim. 1:4 Twomey offers, without translation or note, the following from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me,
For Paul, that writeth unto Tymothee
Repreveþ hem that weyven soothfastnesse
and tellen fable, and swich wreccednesse
Why sholde I sowen draf out of my fest,
when I may sowen whete, if that me lest?

Twomey does give the gist of the context: the section is from the opening of the Parson's Tale and seems, as Twomey explains 'implicitly to condemn the tales which precede his own as wretched insofar as they mix truth and 'fables', understood here not as fictions but as lies... [M]any, like the Parson, find the Pastor's advice to Timothy a rejection of figurative language as unsuitable' (p. 20). But why also include the quotation, particularly with no note, since it gives me little beyond cause to lament that 'weyven soothfastnesse' is no longer common English. There are other – though not many – examples similar to this. Most readers should expect occasional moments of contextual disorientation, particularly since commentators are ordered thematically, with no attempt made, at all, to sort chronology or cultural/historical location. This is not the modern, hyper-organised Smithsonian; it is a messy mass of curiosities crammed into a Victorian castle.

To ease some of the vertigo that myopic reading can produce, the volume includes a glossary of interpreters in the back of the volume. These are almost entirely just very brief bios with dates (for example: 'James Joyce' [1882–1941]. Irish novelist, author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*.' or 'Kierkegaard, Søren [1813–55]. Danish philosopher & Lutheran teacher.'). They seem better suited to illicit 'oh yes, that's right' from the

generally well-read than to give substantial data to the less erudite. By no means would this disorientation be limited to some struggling undergraduate or the legendary ‘non-specialist, adult general reader.’ I, myself, am still not completely sure who ‘Winchester, Elhanan (1751–97). American Universalist’ is when he’s at home.

These moments of disorientation, however, mark the very central strength of the book. What makes this volume ‘work’ is the erudition and literacy of the commentary selected. The bibliography for the volume, alone, is almost worth the price of the book. Twomey has included insights from Augustine, Calvin, Wesley, Chrysostom, Sylvan the Presbyter, Methodius, Guigo de Ponte, Oecumenius of Tricca, John Knox, Gallway Kinnel, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Erasmus, John Donne, Jonathan Edwards, Graham Greene, Herman Melville, Virginia Woolfe, Henry More, Jerome, John of Damascus, C. S. Lewis, Matthew Henry. His bibliography of monographs, commentaries and essays on the Pastorals includes modern criticism such as Dale Martin, Rosemary Reuther, J. D. G. Dunn, C. Spicq. In one section, the reader snaps from comment by Tim LaHaye to James Cone with a jolt like the first hard bank of a vintage wooden roller-coaster. The comments move from James Shannon to Harriet Stowe, from Irenaus to Marcion. In time, switching from Bultmann to Barth hardly merits a yawn.

Readers searching for something to irritate or to affirm personal values (not to mention intellectual standards) will find something to do both. Everyone will be irritated, amazed, stunned, angered, outraged, encouraged, reassured, challenged, convicted, assuaged, endorsed, rebuked, horrified, vindicated and/or inspired by something someone else has said about the Pastorals. The books margins, unless a reader is far more disciplined than I am, will become filled with ‘*’s and ‘?!?’ More than once, I was driven to irritate my wife and office neighbours with ‘you gotta hear this’ followed by a short reading.

In some ways, this eclecticism aligns with the absence of the actual biblical text (remember: the Bible itself is only summarised) to clarify that this sense of baffling engagement is the actual point. The commentary is less interested in the voice of the text itself than in the echoes resounding off the walls of the hall. This, I think, mirrors a turn in biblical studies at present toward issues of reception history, cultural studies, postcolonial and (sub)altern perspectives etc. Ironically, in the ‘aftermath’ of certainty regarding biblical hermeneutics, the Bible, as event, as artefact, indeed as agent, is becoming more and more a question for biblical scholarship. In a sense, we are shifting the inquiry from the centuries old question ‘what would the Bible have me/us become’, toward ‘what have I/we become because of the Bible.’

One quickly finds oneself lost in the examination of intricate exegetical and cultural oddities. I could scarcely complete a chapter without being sent to re-rummage through a curious portion of a forgotten Greek phrase. The experience was not at all unlike a trip to a natural history museum or the unpacking of a long neglected attic trunk. At first blush, the volume offers a survey of scholarship, a reflection on how and why the text has been interpreted. Ultimately, however, like a good museum – particularly the ‘old Smithsonian’ kind – the volume awakens the reader's own reflection on the reader's own values, interpretive ideas, needs, and impressions. As a history of scholarship, there is something in this book every reader will already know. There is something no reader would expect. There will be something a reader never even knew existed and could never have imagined. There will be something as familiar as one's own soul, something every reader wants to affirm. There is something every reader will find edi-horrifying.

Welcome to Biblical Studies.

Perhaps *this* is the book's best use: to orient new arrivals (and remind regulars) to the ridiculously disorienting world of Biblical scholarship, with all its insight, noise, humour, rage, reasonableness, balance, prejudice, wisdom, wrongheadedness, comfort, exasperation, success and failure. These comments beg to be talked and written about, and taught. But they also provoke a sense of humility. We are not the first, nor the last, readers of this text. It is not ours. Twomey's volume reminds us of the messy majesty of what we do, and the limited shelf-life of our articles, commentaries and, of course, book reviews.