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**From the Selected Works of John Reeve**

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## Book Review of History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader, by William Yarchin

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Acts, is examined (chap. 7). Witherington offers a basic sketch of Paul's life in a way that combines exegesis with a more homiletical style. Other stories that receive attention include the "holy family" (Joseph, Mary, and James) (chap. 8) and Jesus, as related outside the Gospels (chap. 9) and within the Gospels (chap. 10). The book ends with a poem (271), two chronological tables, a chart with units of weight and measure, and maps.

The book contains helpful information for the beginner who wants to explore the NT more deeply, yet more demanding readers may also benefit from discussions on academic issues, such as the Synoptic problem, the character of NT Christology, and Paul's role in earliest Christianity. Witherington's vast learning is evident throughout the book, and footnote references to his earlier works indicate where more detailed discussions can be found. What is surprising is that references to his own work total almost 50 percent of the footnotes and bibliography.

Witherington's approach is basically conservative, but conservative readers may not feel comfortable, for example, with the idea that Peter was not the author of 2 Peter (67, 94) or that the Beloved Disciple, who was the author but not the editor of the Fourth Gospel, was not John the son of Zebedee (82-84). In the main, however, Witherington's positions are not polemical and will be accepted by most readers irrespective of their theological orientation. Exceptions to this are a few exegetical statements that are not well justified; references to fuller discussions by the author elsewhere may give the impression that the issue is settled, when it is not. For example, Witherington insists that Jesus is especially presented in John's Gospel as Wisdom incarnate (37-39, 82, 254; cf. his *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995]). Though it is true that some aspects of the Johannine Logos can be explained in light of a wisdom motif, precise correspondence between the two is lacking. With respect to the incarnation, no parallel whatsoever to this concept can be demonstrated in any part of the Jewish sapiential literature or, for that matter, in the wide spectrum of pre-Christian Jewish thought.

Two important omissions are rather disturbing. The first is a discussion on the text of the NT in Part 1. No story that is based on the text of the NT itself can possibly be traced unless it can be shown with enough confidence that this text was handed down without essential loss throughout the centuries. The second is the story of John the Baptist, whose intimate association with the NT story has been recognized since the time of early Christian preaching (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37; 13:24-25).

Overall, this study will certainly find a ready audience among university-level readers and laypersons seeking to understand where the NT came from and what it is about.

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Yarchin, William. *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004. xxx + 444 pp. Hardcover, \$34.95.

If it ever was, it is no longer enough to interpret Scripture without consideration of how it has been interpreted in the past. Many of the assumptions about the obvious meanings of texts reflect millennia-long experience with the text by a surprisingly diverse cadre of interpreters. It is to make available an introduction to this wealth of interpretive experience that William Yarchin addresses a serious lacuna in scholarly reference by presenting, in a single volume, a host of Jewish and Christian interpreters covering twenty-two centuries.

Yarchin begins with a preface (vii-ix), which announces his aim to include prime examples of interpretation, and his reflections on the history of interpretation, proceeding chronologically from the second century B.C.E. to the end of the twentieth century. He makes the necessary caveat that a single volume must, by necessity, leave out more than it can include, but he gives an astute bibliography of twenty-two recent (1988-2002) and more specific books that each deal with a segment of what he is attempting more generally.

In the Introduction, Yarchin gives general information about the worldviews and interpretive needs of each age, dividing history into traditional chunks. In Part 1, the period 150 B.C.E. to 100 C.E., Yarchin stresses the attitude of respect for ancient texts during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, pointing out the similarities between the allegorization of Homer (chap. 1) and the philosophic interpretation of Moses by Philo of Alexandria and Pseudo-Aristeas (chap. 2). He also introduces the interpretation of the mysteries by the Essenes of Qumran (chap. 3). Each chapter includes more specific introductory material for the individual or group of interpreters discussed, along with annotated selections from their interpretations. In Parts 2 and 3, Yarchin examines early Christian (100-600 C.E.) and then Jewish interpretation (150-1500 C.E.).

Included on the Christian side are chapters on Justin Martyr, Origen, Tyconius, Augustine, Theodore of Mopsuestia with Theodoret of Cyprus, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Lyra with the *Glossa ordinaria* on Ps 23. Each chapter begins with a well-researched introduction, which includes a short bibliography of the latest and best works on each interpreter. Then Yarchin includes annotated passages, sampling the interpretation styles and, where available, passages which specifically discuss the hermeneutics being used. These include excerpts from expected passages, such as Origen's *De principiis* book 4, Tyconius's *Liber regularum*, and Augustine's *de doctrina Christiana*. One cannot fault any of the interpreters included, but it is always hard to let go of those left out, such as Irenaeus and Alcuin. Irenaeus's conception of one single, correct reading of the text would have made a nice contrast to Origen's and Augustine's multivalent views of the text. Yarchin does reference Irenaeus in the Introduction, quoting a hermeneutical section of *Adversus haereses* book 4 (xviii). However, the lack of Alcuin or any of the Carolingians leaves a hiatus from Gregory the Great until Thomas Aquinas.

The section on Rabbinic interpretation from 150-1500 C.E. is squeezed even smaller than the Christian section, but it is refreshing to have both the Christian and Jewish interpreters side by side in a single book. Many readers will no doubt benefit from Yarchin's introductory chapter on Rabbinic interpretation, where he gives good definitions to many of the terms needed to understand this Jewish interpretive tradition, such as *halakah*, *haggadah*, *midrash*, *darshan*, *Tannaim*, and *Amoraim*. He also briefly introduces, or at least mentions, the main lines of Rabbinic literature: Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, and the midrashic book-by-book commentaries *Mekilta*, *Sifre*, and *Sifra*, but for some reason books such as *Genesis Rabbah*, *Leviticus Rabbah*, and *Song of Songs Rabbah* are mentioned only in a footnote (114, n. 6). Yarchin's systematic introductions focus on the interpreters themselves more than on their works. For instance, he ends this introductory chapter with a series of paragraphs on each of the major rabbinic authorities most involved with scriptural interpretation, beginning with Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha and Rabbi Akiva early in the Tannaitic period, to Rabbi Issi ben Akiva and Rabbi Abbaye late in the Amoraic period. This makes an excellent survey of the major Jewish interpreters and hermeneutical theorists as far as it goes, but it breaks off at the end of the Amoraic period, leaving no introduction to the Jewish interpreters from the

fifth through the thirteenth centuries, except for those few who are included in the following three chapters. Once again, there is no fault to be found with the few selections that are included in these three chapters: sections from *Mekilta*, Rashi, Ramban; a selection from Tractate *Yoma* from the Palestinian Talmud; some selections from the comments on Ps 23 in the *Yalqut Shim'oni* (for comparison with the *Glossa ordinaria* selections in the preceding Christian section); and a chapter on the exegesis of Sa'adia ben Joseph.

The last two sections of the book, "Modern Interpretation (1500-Present)" and "Late Modern Interpretation (1970-Present)," primarily treat the rise, dominance of, and reactions to historical criticism applied to the Bible. Yarchin begins by examining the roots of "a more historical mind-set" (171) by sorting through parts of the comments on Ps 23 found in six commentators in the *Critici Sacri*: Sebastian Münster, François Vatable, Isidore Clarius, Johannes Drusius, Sixtinus Amama, and Hugo Grotius. He then moves to the concern for authorial intent as portrayed in the exegesis of John Calvin. In this way, he uses the Renaissance and Reformation to set the agenda for the modern search for historical understanding of the Scriptures. From there, he examines Baruch Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, and David Friedrich Strauss in order to explain the development of modern historical understanding of the ancient world in general and ancient Judaism in particular. Also included are Hermann Gunkel and the distinctions between literary genre, Rudolph Bultmann and the distinction between the textual and historical Jesus, and William F. Albright and the addition of physical archaeological evidence to the historical picture of the biblical world.

Yarchin's chapter on Langdon Gilkey presents a reaction to the previous chapters that is simultaneously appreciative and critical of historical-biblical studies. He uses Gilkey's position in the Biblical Theology movement to show how the disconnect between the ancient and modern worldviews requires a historical interpretation of the Bible, but how, at the same time, faith and God's continued acting and speaking require a current application to our lives in our present situation. Yarchin uses George Ernst Wright heavily in this chapter to bolster Gilkey's biblical theology and its attempt to reach back in history for understanding, while reaching to the present and immediate future to apply that understanding.

The final chapter of the "Modern" section is devoted to Christian Hartlich, who is better known for his work on the philosophy of history than in the field of biblical interpretation. Yarchin includes large excerpts of Hartlich's 1978 essay "Historisch-kritische Methode in ihrer Anwendung auf Geschehnisaussagen der Hl. Schrift" ("Historical-Critical Method in Its Application to Statements Concerning Events in the Holy Scriptures," trans. D. Doughty, 1995) as part of his "reader." Hartlich reduces historical-critical methodology into eight theses, each with a rationale and supporting arguments. He argues that a distinction must be made between what can be represented as historical fact (being completely verifiable) and a conceivable event (which may or may not have great evidence). He ascertains that simply because an event, such as the resurrection of Jesus, is not a verifiable fact does not preclude it from having historically happened. However, his clarified terminology does not allow for a unique event to be named a factual, historical reality. Yarchin did well in including Hartlich as both a critique of and support for historical methodology.

Part 5, on late modern interpretation, includes various interpretive methodologies that go beyond, critique, or ignore historical criticism. Yarchin devotes chapters to the canonical approach of Brevard Childs, the retro-interpretation of David Steinmetz, the theological interpretation of Jon Levenson, the critiques of objectivity by Walter Wink

and Edgar McKnight, the rhetorical approaches of Phyllis Tribble and Dale Patrick, the ideological critique of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and the postmodern multivalence of Fernando Segovia.

As is often the case, the book's greatest strength—bringing the history of interpretation to the present—is also its greatest weakness. By spending nearly 50 percent of its content on the twentieth century, it has pruned too much from earlier times. However, that does not take away from Yarchin's achievement of putting together a readable and usable history of biblical interpretation that is excellently suited to college and divinity-school classrooms, as well as a quick reference of who's who in biblical interpretation.

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