Refreshing the foundations:
An introduction to biblical Introduction

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Recently I began a period of study leave. My intention was to compare what is now being taught in Old and New Testament Introduction to those who are preparing for ordination, with what was being taught when I was an undergraduate in the early 1970s. I was aware that a number of new methods and approaches had entered biblical research in the meantime and I wondered how far they had impacted on the teaching of these foundational courses. In the event it soon appeared that the extent to which the newer methods and approaches could be included in such courses was limited by constraints of the time available for teaching. Course content relating to the historical-critical method had on the whole been brought up to date, but newer approaches had made less impact than I had expected. One important exception being the inclusion of some reference to feminist, womanist and postcolonial approaches. These now provide students with a more appropriate awareness of the place from which our interpretation of the biblical texts is made, since place is such an important factor in establishing and taking proper account of the presuppositions we bring to biblical texts.

An important aspect of my intention to compare past and present approaches to Old and New Testament Introduction was to attempt to bring my own understanding of these areas up to date almost forty years after I had taken these courses. Some of the resources I found useful might be of interest to colleagues who feel that it would be helpful, following a number of years in parish ministry, to undertake some studies to refresh or even expand on what was learned in the courses of Old and New Testament Introduction that were taken at undergraduate level.

A significant amount of academic biblical (and theological) scholarship is in the public domain on the Internet. Much of it can

be downloaded from YouTube, often in short segments taken from longer presentations, such as lectures and debates. Pride of place must go to the Yale University courses of Old and New Testament Introduction, which may be downloaded complete and without cost.[1] The Old Testament course is taught by Christine Hayes and consists of 24 lectures delivered in 2006; the 2009 New Testament course by Dale B. Martin has 26 lectures. Besides the downloadable video of these lectures, the Yale site also makes available a transcript of each lecture so that it is also possible to read the lectures or append one's own notes to the transcript. To get the best out of these courses, it is good practice to read carefully the biblical texts that are assigned prior to each lecture as well as the relevant sections of the *Jewish Study Bible* and Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, the course text books set by Hayes and Martin respectively.[2]

An interesting and ultimately worthwhile feature of the Old Testament course is the extent to which Hayes introduces her students to Jewish scholarship of the Hebrew Bible. For those of us whose introduction to the Old Testament tended to focus on European (Alt and Noth) and North American (Albright and Bright) scholarship, Hayes adds the bonus of an introduction to the work of some of the most important figures in twentieth-century Jewish biblical scholarship such as Yehezkel Kaufmann and Nahum Sarna. The course pays the most detailed attention to the first four books of the Hebrew Bible (ten lectures) followed by Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (five lectures). It is largely, almost exclusively, concerned with biblical Israel (i.e., the story of Israel as it is represented in the Bible) so that the failure to deal adequately with the recent and on-going debate in relation to historical Israel (i.e., the story of Israel as it is being reconstructed by historical-critical method) may be seen as a significant deficiency. Thus she states with respect to the exile that only the poor are left behind (Lecture 15), a situation further explained when (in Lecture 18) she says that 'The fall of Jerusalem shattered the national and territorial basis of Israel's culture and religion. The Babylonians had burned the temple to the ground, they carried away most of the people to exile, to live in exile in Babylon, leaving behind mostly members of the lower classes to eke out a living as best they

could.'

Against this characterization of the exile, one ought to take account of the arguments of Carroll and Barstad that take issue with the myth of the empty land.[3] Given the many references to the exile that occur throughout the course it is surprising that there is not some reference to the considerable recent secondary literature relating to that period. It is also curious that the only discussion of scholarship that advances a late date of composition of biblical texts is with reference to the contributions of Thomas L. Thompson and John Van Seters on the patriarchal narratives of Genesis (Lecture 6),[4] published in 1974 and 1975 respectively! The discussion has moved on considerably since then and even if the recordings of her lectures are now six years old there is surprisingly little reference to the thirty years that followed these publications. During those years there was an increased scepticism concerning the historicity of the Exodus and Conquest traditions and the traditions relating to the united monarchy. The results of archaeological research that included surveys of the central highlands and the excavation of the cities said to have been conquered by Joshua also contributed to an increased acceptance of a generally later dating of the documents that comprise the Old Testament. Certainly, Hayes notes that neither Jericho nor Ai were walled or show evidence of destruction levels in the time of Joshua and that 'archaeologists have found that Jerusalem was [...] a very small town really until the end of the eighth century'[5] when it grew rapidly. The general paucity of critique of important recent work suggests that for all its undeniable merits her course requires to be supplemented by further reading in these areas.

Dale Martin's course of New Testament Introduction is well worth following through from beginning to end. Besides being highly informative, the product of a well-read and productive scholar, Martin has an entertaining style and is an effective communicator and teacher.[6] His class motto – *de omnibus dubitandum* (doubt everything) – is designed to encourage students to check what they hear in class critically and not simply accept what he tells them. My only disappointment with this course is that there was just one lecture on the historical Jesus, for it whetted my appetite for the semester-long seminar on the subject that Martin offers his students at Yale.

At the time, however, YouTube had a course on the historical Jesus consisting of 12 half-hour talks by Bart Ehrman under the title: 'Prof. Bart Ehrman – Historical Jesus Series', which now appears to have been removed, although some of it may still be available elsewhere.[7]

More recently, a course of 27 lectures in Old Testament Introduction delivered at New York University by Daniel E. Fleming has also become available both on YouTube and the New York University (NYU) site.[8] Fleming is another good teacher who interacts a lot with his class, a feature that has some drawbacks for those who access his lectures on the Internet rather than the classroom. Many of the interventions of his students are almost inaudible so that often the answer is heard, but not the question. Nevertheless, it is well worth persevering with these lectures. Just as Hayes provides more information on Jewish scholarship than is usually possible in the context of preparing candidates for ministry in the United Kingdom, Fleming devotes a significant amount of time to discussing Near Eastern background and archaeology. In this respect, in the thirteenth lecture ("Archaeology's Tenth-Century Solution") he includes an extended discussion of the debate between Finkelstein and Mazar concerning the Jerusalem 'stepped-stone structure' and the 'low chronology' advanced by Finkelstein. As with the Yale courses, it is beneficial to use the textbooks set for the course.[9]

Apart from these Yale and NYU courses, much good quality debate and lecture material on biblical and theological subjects is available on the Internet although, without doubt, the trick is separating the good stuff from the dross. It is best to concentrate on contributions from scholars who are involved in, or have recently retired from teaching biblical studies and theology at mainline colleges and universities. The most obvious problem with facilities such as YouTube is that anyone can put their own views, however idiosyncratic, into the public domain so that side-by-side with solid scholarship stands material that cannot be considered as anything other than a waste of space.

Although not an introductory course, Shaye Cohen's "The Hebrew Scriptures in Judaism and Christianity", is available without charge in iTunes U.[10] This provides some fascinating historical insights into many of the relationships and differences between the two faiths in their appropriation of the Hebrew scriptures. Informative and

entertaining, even if in parts debatable, this is another course that is worth following through. Many of his lectures, in fact, would be of considerable interest outside the context of the course.

There is much material available on the Internet, however, that is of real value. Among the complete lectures I found are: Robert Alter, "The Bible Through Literary Eyes" and "Translating the Hebrew Bible: The Challenges and the Pleasures"; David Aune, "What Really Happened to Paul on the Road to Damascus?"; Craig Blomberg, "In Search of the Historical Jesus"; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire"; Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine on the Redemption of the Jews"; John P. Meier; "Jesus the Jew – But What Sort of Jew?"; and N. T. Wright, "Revelation and Christian Hope", and several contributions to the Burke lectureship (University of California) among many others. Short video excerpts provide a taster of the work of a good number of significant scholars including Karen Armstrong, Walter Brueggemann, John Dominic Crossan, William Dever, Robert Eisenman, David Noel Freedman, Larry Hurtado, Luke Timothy Johnson, Amy-Jill Levine, Carol Meyers, and N. T. Wright.

For those with a preference for books, an almost bewildering array of Introductions in Old and New Testament have been published in the past thirty or so years. While there is still considerable value in the Introductions I purchased as a student,[11] it is appropriate to mention some of the more recent additions to that genre. Before doing so, it ought to be stated clearly that, on account of the size and complexity of the Bible as a body of literature/sacred texts, no one Introduction to Old or New Testament is likely ever to be so comprehensive as to do justice to every aspect of study that is appropriate to its purpose.[12] It is generally better to consult more than one Introduction – and better still to consult more specific literature on any topic of interest. An Introduction might give a certain amount of information about a great many matters relating to the Bible and in many cases provide some direction towards more complete discussions as well as competing views. However, except when used for the most cursory purposes it will always provide for a beginning to, rather than an end of study. With this limitation in mind, out of a host of recent contributions the following appear in many respects to be more useful.

John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004, with CD-ROM) is recommended over his briefer *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress, 2007), which omits the material from his earlier volume on five of the minor prophets as well as three of the deuterocanonical books.[13] The two versions of his Introduction seek to place the Old Testament in its Near Eastern context, which is particularly valuable. In several respects Collins' work is representative of an older historical-critical approach and is committed to a more cautious conservative dating of sources than many would favour today.

Don C. Benjamin, *The Old Testament Story: An Introduction* (Fortress, 2004, also with CD-ROM), focuses more on the stories and culture of the people who produced the Hebrew Bible and provides a very accessible approach to the subject, although he deals with even fewer of the minor prophets than Collins does in his *Short Introduction*. He is particularly sensitive to the literary character of the texts and has a clear concern to demonstrate the value of the Old Testament for the contemporary reader and for faith.[14] Barry Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament* (4th ed.; Wadsworth, 2003) is another substantial Introduction that some readers may find more useful than those cited above; it should certainly be on any shortlist. It is also worth noting that Christine Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* based on the Yale Open Course discussed above, was published in November 2012 by Yale University Press.

Among shorter Introductions, Alice L. Laffey, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Fortress, 1988), and Anthony R. Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Orbis Books, 2001, expanded edition), clearly bring different and distinctive perspectives to the task, while Hans M. Barstad, *A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), fulfils the remit of its title admirably. A quite different niche market is served by David Carr's recent contribution, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010),[15] which sets out to introduce the Old Testament texts as they evolved from their earliest beginnings into the several canons that are treasured in the various Jewish and Christian traditions. By refusing to follow the

well-beaten path of the genre, which generally treats the books of the Old Testament in their canonical order, and by treating the texts in relation to the periods and contexts out of which they arose, Carr provides a different sort of Introduction. This approach relates the biblical texts to the successive contexts from which they arose, and might help readers to better appreciate the development and growth of the texts as well as the social, political and religious situations they addressed. As Carr indicates in his preface, a prominent theme of the book centres round the way in which the books of the Bible reflect quite different sorts of interaction with the past and present empires that dominated the ancient Near East. While there may be room to debate dates and specific contexts of some of the texts as these are situated by Carr, his Introduction is certainly worth using, not least because it provides an alternative way of setting out material germane to biblical Introduction. In addition, by providing study questions and review sections designed to facilitate revision and learning, each chapter is set up in a manner that encourages the reader to work at understanding the most important aspects of its content before proceeding with the next chapter. Although some of the contexts to which he relates particular texts may be debatable, it would be more appropriate to enter that debate in relation to his more recent and more technical discussion, which attempts to offer new orientation points for the history of the development of the Hebrew Bible.[16]

The New Testament is well served by Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, 1997) and Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (4th ed.; Oxford University Press, 2007), while Ehrman has also published *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Oxford University Press, 2008). Other recent Introductions to the New Testament include, David A. de Silva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (InterVarsity Press, 2004) and Dale B. Martin, *Introduction to New Testament History and Literature* (Yale University Press, 2012), published in relation to the Open Yale Courses discussed above. In addition, M. Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012) and a revised edition of Pheme Perkins, *Reading the New Testament:*

An Introduction (Paulist Press, 2012) are now also available. Howard Clark Kee, *The Beginnings of Christianity: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005), is another substantial and recent volume that is worth considering. Delbert Burkett's *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) also deserves to be mentioned, not least because it takes seriously the Hellenistic and Roman background against which the New Testament was written. Post-colonial issues will be addressed by R. S. Sugirtharajah in *The New Testament: A Postcolonial Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, late 2013) and a more conservative approach is represented by D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd revised ed.; Apollos, 2005).

Many other volumes of Introduction to Old and New Testament have been published over the last forty or so years, some of which do as well as those mentioned above in fulfilling their purpose. I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive listing. Arguably, however, it is always best to have more than one Introduction to hand since, on the one hand, no single volume will ever cover every aspect of so vast a field and, on the other, this permits access to a range of opinions. Others might choose differently, but among those mentioned there is sufficient variety to allow the choice of two or three of the more recent and up-to-date Introductions to both Testaments and it is always best if at least one is *not* from a favourite publisher or author!

Of course, the Introduction genre provides a beginning point for our study and should not be thought of as the finished article; often it can be supplemented usefully by referring to the introductory chapters of more detailed studies. In this respect, I found Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Eisenbrauns, 2006) and Thomas Romer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (T&T Clark, 2006) particularly helpful in relation to recent developments in those areas of Old Testament studies they address. Again, examples of scholarly works that include helpful introductions to the present state of scholarship could be cited for virtually every area of current research. Good summaries of particular areas of study appear regularly in the journal *Currents in Biblical Research*.

When many of us first encountered Old and New Testament Introductions we were quickly taken outside our comfort zone, which was something at least some of our teachers were able to sympathize with, for they had shared that experience when they first began their own studies.[17] We became acquainted with an approach to the study of the Bible of which we had no prior knowledge. Some of us found it more liberating than others and more promising in its outcome. Some found it more threatening and perhaps consequently have made less use of it in their ministry. Over the years it is perhaps too easy for those of us who engage in ministry to fall back into a comfort zone, whether as a result of our having become too comfortable with what we learned back then or because we have abandoned what we learned as students. Perhaps the function of engaging in a refresher course in an area of study that was so foundational to our theological education is that we once again venture outside our comfort zone and there rediscover something of the excitement and the promise that comes with learning new things.

In a rapidly changing world, biblical scholarship has been changing rapidly, not only in the introduction of so many new methods and reading strategies, but also in the application of historical method to questions such as the history of Israel and the historical Jesus. While this is not the place to offer a survey of these changes, I would comment briefly on one matter that concerns me, since it may have implications for the way the Church uses the Bible. It is a matter of concern that a number of scholars have recently advocated the separation of biblical from theological studies.[18]

Certainly there are areas of study and questions that more distinctively belong to the Academy on the one hand or the Church on the other, but if the Church does not take full account of the debates and results of academic biblical scholarship its account of the Bible will be inadequate. If the academic study of the Bible has revealed information about its origins, development, history, meaning, and much else besides, the Church dare not ignore that. The argument that the findings of the historical-critical method are not fixed or that the history of Israel is hotly debated by so-called maximalists and minimalists – with other scholars taking up a broad range of positions that lie between these extremes – is not sufficient reason to ignore

the results of biblical or archaeological research. Of course, texts and artifacts alike have to be interpreted, but there are not two different Bibles, one belonging to the Academy and the other to the Church. Study in the one sphere should not be irrelevant to the other.[19] For the Church there can be no return to a pre-Enlightenment understanding of matters such as authorship and biblical history or the like, far less the proof-texting methods of the Westminster divines. If it is to engage fruitfully with a modern and post-modern audience the Church must listen to the Academy perhaps more closely than ever, at a time when academic study and its associated publications appear to be moving at a greater pace than for several generations past.

To turn to the tasks that more distinctively belong to the Church than to the Academy, given the direction the present debate in academic biblical studies is taking, not least in relation to the history of ancient Israel and research regarding the historical Jesus, it is imperative that theology learns to deal with parallel stories: the biblical story (or stories), the critically re-constructed story, and their relationship(s). Each of the canonical Gospels tells the story of Jesus differently and each of these stories again differs to a greater or lesser degree, but often significantly from the critically-reconstructed story. Similarly, there are significant differences between the stories told in Kings and Chronicles and these again differ from the critically-reconstructed history of ancient Israel. From the point of view of the Academy and its concern with the critically-reconstructed story these differences may not matter. However, from the point of view of the Church, although it is the biblical texts themselves that provide a basis for preaching, the relationship between the biblical texts and the critically-reconstructed story must be of great significance. If, as the critically-reconstructed story suggests, there was no exodus, no conquest, and perhaps no Saul, David or Solomon – at least as these are represented in the biblical texts – and if (to take but one example from the Gospels) the great incompatibility of the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke suggest that we know little or nothing historically about the birth of Jesus,[20] then to continue preaching on such matters as if we did not know what biblical criticism has taught us must ultimately be to the detriment of the Church and of the Church's reputation.

There are many detractors of the Church and its book. I am concerned that whenever, as preachers and theologians we ignore the debates in critical biblical scholarship and their outcomes we provide the detractors with ammunition against both Bible and Church. Admittedly, no-one can master the entire field of biblical studies – today this includes too many specialities and cross-disciplinary approaches – however, refreshing from time-to-time what we were once taught in the introductory courses we attended is a good way of both tracking trends and movements in the discipline and preventing us from straying back into bad habits in our reading and preaching on the texts. Importantly, it will keep before us the prime theological task of teasing out the significance of the relationship that exists between the stories told in the biblical texts and the often very different realities that lie behind them.

If an exploration of some of the resources discussed above should encourage the reader to undertake further reading, the question arises, where to begin? One obvious answer is to follow up on aspects of some of the reading already undertaken. Where some aspect of a question addressed in biblical Introduction has stimulated curiosity, there are usually bibliographical pointers to be found in the study material.

I conclude with a briefly annotated bibliography of some recent books that might be helpful in progressing study. Some of these books provide examples of how some of the newer methodological approaches work with texts in practice, and some help to provide a useful orientation with respect to how, as interpreters of Scripture within a faith environment, the preacher might move from matters of Introduction to a form of interpretation that is appropriate to the situations s/he addresses and the place from which s/he addresses those situations. For the most part, the studies referred to for further reading provide an orientation towards the newer interpretive reading strategies that have become typical of so much of the scholarly literature, although these ought to be seen as a complement to, rather than a substitute for historical-critical method.

For further reading

Paula Gooder, ed., *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (SPCK, 2008). Edited and largely written by Gooder, this book provides a brief introduction in twenty-three short chapters to a wide variety of reading strategies. Some seventeen pages of references comprise a substantial bibliography.

Choi He An and Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, eds., *Engaging the Bible: Critical Readings from Contemporary Women* (Fortress, 2006). Five women theologians engage the Bible from different cultural, ethnic and/or social perspectives. The value of this little 150-page book is out of proportion to its size. It provides a vivid reminder that the Bible is read today in many other contexts apart from our own and chastens our impulse towards interpretive imperialism.

For readers who want to explore further the impact of social and cultural location on the reading of biblical texts, the two volumes edited by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, *Reading From This Place, vol. 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* and *Reading From This Place, vol. 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (both Fortress, 1995) provide a good starting place. The first of these volumes explores how social location impacts on biblical interpretation, while the second provides examples of interpretation from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America.

A number of recent collections illustrate well how some of the different methods and procedures that have made their way into biblical studies over the past several decades can be applied to particular books of the Bible. These include Gale A. Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Fortress, 2nd edition, 2007); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (2nd ed.; Fortress, 2008); Thomas B. Dozeman, ed., *Methods for Exodus* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mark Allan Powell, ed., *Methods for Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Joel B. Green, ed., *Methods for Luke* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), the last three volumes being published in the *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* series.

Two companion volumes that seek to provide a bridge between academic study of the Bible and its use in Christian contexts are Carolyn J. Sharp, *Wrestling the Word: The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Believer* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) and Jaime Clark-Soles, *Engaging the Word: The New Testament and the Christian Believer* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). These books may prove useful to anyone who is struggling with the relevance of the broad range of questions and strategies that have had some bearing on biblical studies in recent times, even at an introductory level. They have been written by scholars who have a strong commitment both to teaching and to their own faith community. Sharp (who teaches at Yale Divinity School) was ordained to the Episcopal priesthood in April 2012, while Clark-Soles, who teaches at Perkins School of Theology, was ordained to the American Baptist Churches USA, in 1996; both contribute to WorkingPreachers.org.

Notes

1 Open Yale Courses (http://oyc.yale.edu/) make available some 35 introductory courses taught at Yale, which can be accessed from the home page. Old Testament Introduction may be accessed directly at http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-145; New Testament at http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rlst-152. These courses are also available at http://www.openculture.com/freeonlinecourses on the Open Culture site.

2 Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, (4th ed.; New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). In addition Hayes sets James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East, vol. 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958).

3 R. P. Carroll, "The Myth of the Empty Land", *Semeia* 59 (1992): 79–93; H. M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land. A Study*

in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the "Exilic" Period (Symbolae Osloenses, Fasciculum suppletorium 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), reprinted in H. M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (*FAT* 61; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 90–134; H. M. Barstad, 'After the "Myth of the Empty Land": Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah', in O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3–20.

4 Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (*BZAW* 133; Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974); John van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975).

5 Christine Hayes, "Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 14 – The Deuteronomistic History: Response to Catastrophe (1 and 2 Kings) [October 25, 2006]". Transcript at http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/957/rlst-145

6 The serious attention he has given to teaching is evident in Dale B. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

7 An audio version may still be found at http://archive.org/details/1historicaljesus. Some courses in Old and New Testament studies are available for payment on *The Great Courses* web site (http://www.greatcourses.com), including twenty-four 30 minute lectures by Ehrman on the historical Jesus.

8 Fleming's lectures can be accessed on the NYU site at http://www.nyu.edu/academics/open-education/coursesnew/cultures-contexts-ancient-israel.html

9 Fleming sets three text books, *The Jewish Study Bible* (see note 2 above), M. D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

10 https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/hebrew-scriptures-in-judaism/id512201207

[11] Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. P. R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965); Otto Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testamen*t (trans. J. Sturdy; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975); Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. D. Green; London: SPCK., 1970); W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. H. C. Kee; London: SCM, 1966); Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to Its Problems* (trans. G. Buswell; Oxford : Blackwell, 1968).

[12] An extensive list of Old Testament Introductions that includes many published in recent times and distinguishes between these most suitable for beginning and more technical study is maintained by Charles Conroy at http://www.cjconroy.net/bib/introd-ot.htm.

[13] It is a surprising feature of Collins' *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* that it also provides introduction to the deuterocanonical books as these originated in Greek rather than Hebrew.

[14] More recently, Benjamin has published *Stones and Stories: An Introduction to Archaeology and the Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2010).

[15] The book covers in identical fashion or with some revision much of the content of the similarly titled *An Introduction to the Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) co-authored with Colleen M. Conway, in which Conway deals with the New Testament.

[16] D. M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[17] Robert Davidson, in "The Bible in Church and Academy" [in Alastair G. Hunter and Phillip R. Davies, eds., *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Biblical Prophecy, Ideology and Reception in Tribute to Robert Carroll* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 161–173] confesses that his own religious beliefs developed in narrowly conservative circles which held strongly to the infallibility of the Bible as originally given – whatever that means (p. 166).

[18] These include Robert A. Oden, *The Bible Without Theology* (San Francisco; London: Harper & Row, 1987); Phillip R. Davies, *Whose*

Bible Is It Anyway? (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 2009); Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2007); and Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). A flavour of the arguments for this view may be gained by accessing Phillip R. Davies, "Whose Bible? Anyone's?" at http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/whose.shtml, while Hector Avalos in "To What End? A Response to Niels Peter Lemche" insists that 'the end of biblical studies' contains a double entendre. In one sense, 'the end' refers to the termination of biblical studies as currently practiced. In a second sense, 'the end' refers to the purpose of biblical studies http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/resplem357927.shtml

19 I do not deny that the Bible exists in different canonical forms in the several religious traditions or communities that regard it as scripture. My point is that the Bibles studied in Academy and Church involve much the same set of texts so that although the Church may ultimately make use of a theological interpretation of these texts, theology is not well served if it begins with a denial of what academic study has shown undoubtedly to be true.

20 If one wants to take seriously what the Evangelists say about the birth of Jesus, the *uncritically* reconstructed version presented in the average nativity presentation is a wrong-headed way to go about it and one that distorts what both Matthew and Luke are attempting to convey in their birth narratives. Preaching ought to provide a corrective to the folk elements that have become embedded in nativities, crib scenes, Christmas cards, and so much that surrounds the Christmas celebrations.