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Editorial: Using Scripture then and now

Christoph Stenschke

Recently I was asked to peer-review an article for one of the *other* good theological journals. The author argued persuasively that in 1 Corinthians, Paul’s argument heavily draws on several chapters of Genesis, although he never directly quotes from them.¹ The article shows (once more!) Paul’s enormous knowledge of the Old Testament and his skill in using it to further his own arguments. This case has been argued and proven many times over. However, less attention has been given to the admittedly more difficult side of the equation: the readers of such letters. Did they and could they have recognised what Paul was doing? Was this recognition necessary for them to appreciate the argument, or at least its full impact? Did the argument make sense without this knowledge? Can we know, and if so, how?³

This raises not only interesting questions regarding the use of tradition within the Old Testament, in early Judaism (for example, the ‘Rewritten Bible’) and regarding the use of the Old Testament within the New Testament,² but also more general issues regarding the interpretation of the Bible and its role in theology and in the Church. What role do arguments with Scripture still play? Who argues with Scripture or at least draws on Scripture and in which contexts? How do such discourses ‘function’ in the community of the faithful and beyond? What hermeneutical issues are involved as Scripture needs to be interpreted? Are people able and willing to follow substantial arguments based on Scripture? What kind of knowledge of Scripture is required for them to understand? What happens when Scripture is largely unknown or absent (no, it’s not Captain Ahab but King Ahab, not Moby Dick but Elijah!)? If not with recourse to Scripture, how else have Christians argued in the past, and now in a postmodern, secular age? How compelling are such arguments?

An earlier generation of evangelical theologians argued for the historical reliability and trustworthiness of Scripture (and often did so in a masterful way) over against traditional historical-critical approaches. While this task remains, it seems that

the challenge for now and the future is to argue for the relevance of Scripture and to show how it can be interpreted with intellectual integrity and responsibility before God and people. As the emphasis on Scripture, on its authority and all-sufficiency has been and is (and I believe, needs to remain) a characteristic of evangelical thinking and spirituality, we invite articles on these issues for the *European Journal of Theology*.

And the peer review? Yes, the article was recommended for publication with some minor requirements. One of them was a brief reflection on the ancient readers of Paul’s text.

Prof. Dr Christoph Stenschke is a member of the editorial board of the *European Journal of Theology*.

Endnotes

- 1 See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, ‘1 Corinthians’ in G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007) 695–752 and Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, Nottingham: Apollos, 2010).
- 2 The scholar to address these issues in depth is Christopher D. Stanley; see his essays ‘Paul’s “Use” of Scripture: Why the Audience Matters’ in S.E. Porter and C.D. Stanley, *As it is Written: Studying Paul’s Use of Scripture* (SBL.SS 50; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008) 125–155 and “‘Pearls before Swine’: Did Paul’s Audience Understand His Biblical Quotations?”, *Novum Testamentum* 41 (1999) 124–144 and his monograph *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004) 38–61 (chapter 3: ‘Paul and His Audience(s)’).
- 3 See the excellent surveys in Alan Hauser and Duane F. Watson (eds), *A History of Biblical Interpretation I: The Ancient Period* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003) and Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids, Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2006).