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Reception Theory, H. R. Jauss and the Formative Power of Scripture

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Abstract

Formation constitutes the key link between reception theory, Jauss and scripture. The Bible shapes readers by showing them what lies beyond the self. Hans Robert Jauss (1921–97) remains the effective founder of reception theory or reception history. He was a literary theorist, who specialised in romance literature. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer, he insisted that texts carry 'a still unfinished meaning', and focused on their historical influence. The exposition of how communities or thinkers have received texts includes de-familiarisation; sometimes the 'completion' of meaning, as in much reader-response theory; and instances of when a text 'satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations' of readers. Reception theory can often trace continuity in the reception of texts, as well as disjunctions, reversals and surprises. It offers a more disciplined approach to scripture than most reader-response theories. Clearly horizons of expectation play a major role in the interpretation of *biblical* texts. I suggest six direct parallels with biblical interpretation. (1) Like Francis Watson and others, Jauss rejects any value-neutral objectivism in interpretation. (2) The readers' horizon of expectation derives partly from earlier readings of the text. (3) Horizons can move and change, and thus transform readers as these change. (4) Biblical genres display all of Jauss' accounts of the responses of readers. For example, parables of reversal may surpass what the Christian believer expects, or disappoint the unbeliever. (5) Like Gadamer, Jauss emphasises the importance of formulating constructive questions in approaching texts. (6) Jauss' 'levels of reading' correspond closely with Bakhtin's notion of polyphony. I compare Ormond Rush's work on reception and otherness, and Luther's insistence that the Bible often confronts us as our adversary to judge and to transform us. Finally, we illustrate the history of reception from Ulrich Luz on Matthew, from Childs on Exodus, and from my commentaries on 1 Corinthians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Keywords: formation, Hans Robert Jauss, hermeneutics, horizon of expectation (or Bible), literary theory, reception theory.

Formation is the key link between reception theory and the effects of scripture. Hans Robert Jauss, in effect the founder of modern reception theory, sees

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this approach as rejecting 'a closed past', and liberating readers from 'prejudices, and predicaments of a lived praxis, in that it compels one to a new perception of things'.[1] Reception history, Jauss suggests, can perform 'a socially formative function'.[2] He also urges: 'Question and answer can provide access to the otherness of the past'.[3] His teacher Hans-Georg Gadamer commends *Bildung*, not as *culture*, but as *formation*, which has goals 'outside itself'.[4]

Scripture above all exercises formative power; it gives formation of character and action. It shapes readers by giving them a vision of what lies *beyond* the self. It delivers readers from narcissistic bondage to the self, from self-centred horizons, from self-affirmation and from self-love.[5] David Kelsey made the classic comment that the biblical text as scripture serves '*to shape persons' identities so decisively as to transform them*' (his emphasis).[6] George Lindbeck and Frances Young echo the same point.

Hans Robert Jauss: background, influence and concerns

Hans Robert Jauss (1921–97) remains the effective founder of modern reception theory. Jauss is not a theologian or biblical scholar, but specialised in medieval romance literature. He was especially influenced by Heidegger and Gadamer on historicality, art and hermeneutics. The decisive step came in 1966, with the founding of the University of Constance (or Konstanz), with its new vision for interdisciplinary research. The University appointed a research team of five professors, who included Jauss.

Jauss' Inaugural Lecture of 1967 constituted virtually a manifesto of reception theory. He chose the title: 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'.[7] This sought a 'still-unfinished meaning' in works, following Gadamer.[8] Jauss focused on the historical *influence* of a work.[9] But this 'influence' was to be reciprocal: both how works influenced their readers; and how successive generations of readers influenced the

[1] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 5 and 41.
[2] Ibid., p. 45.
[3] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding', *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), vol. 68, p. 63; cf. pp. 51–94.
[4] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 2nd edn, 1989), p. 11.
[5] On narcissism, see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 127–9 and 213–15.
[6] David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975), p. 91.
[7] This forms the first chapter of Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, pp. 3–45.
[8] Ibid., p. 5.
[9] Ibid., p. 15.

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understanding of texts and works. This is akin to Gadamer's 'history of effects' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).

Jauss draws on Marxist theories of interpretation and on formalism, but goes beyond both. Marxism stresses the *socially formative* power of literature, and Jauss endorses this. Texts and works shape readers and their expectations. He draws on formalism for such devices as 'defamiliarisation', which is a disruptive device to make strange what is otherwise familiar. A number of the parables of Jesus anticipate this method. But Jauss rejected the complacent assumption in formalism that texts are autonomous. The process of communication involves readers.

This prompts Paul de Man to see reader-response as an American near-equivalent to *Rezeptionsästhetik* in Germany. Jauss certainly regards the role of the reader as 'completing' the meaning of the text, as Wolfgang Iser and other reader-response theorists do.[10] But the more radical reader-response theories of Stanley Fish, Norman Holland and David Bleich are more pragmatic and subjective than Jauss' reception rheory. Jauss writes: 'The work enters into the changing horizons-of-experience of a *continuity* . . . from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them.'[11] A work, when it is read, 'satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience'.[12] But Fish would have us believe that an acceptable reading to the community of readers can only mean what affirms its interests; no text can challenge readers from 'outside' the community. In his well-known aphorism Fish asserts: 'The reader's response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning.'[13] The theoretical framework is quite different, even if its starting-point is that of Ingarden and Iser on 'filling in blanks'.

Suggested parallels between Jauss' seven theses and biblical formation and interpretation

In his first thesis Jauss *attacks historical objectivism and the illusion of a value-neutral approach in positivism*. In biblical studies this at once offers a close parallel with the rejection of all studies which purport to be value-neutral because they exclude references to God as a cause, and are supposedly purely 'historical'.

[10] Paul de Man, 'Introduction', to Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. viii.

[11] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 19.

[12] Ibid., p. 25.

[13] Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 3; cf. pp. 1–17; and Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 68–140.

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Francis Watson, among others, provides an excellent exposé of the illusion that a purely 'secular' approach to scripture is genuinely value-neutral.[14]

Second, what constitutes a *horizon of expectation* derives partly from *earlier texts*. A later text may correct, alter or reproduce these.[15] A classic example from biblical studies concerns the Servant Songs, which have more than one level of meaning, even for Jewish interpretation, let alone for the Christian church. Another example would be the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, where much of the material reflects texts in Ezekiel and in apocalyptic Jewish literature.[16]

The third thesis impinges on *formation*. Because all of us, including the authors of texts, live within a concrete and given historical situation, we perceive within a *horizon*. *Horizon* suggests the boundaries within which we can perceive a given viewpoint, but horizons can *move and change*. A moving train or car provides an excellent example. We experience a succession of new and changing horizons. Jauss speaks of 'horizontal change'.[17] Jauss' most familiar example comes from Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, published in 1857. At first the novel was pilloried for appearing to commend adultery. But as the years passed, it was increasingly realised that this was not the verdict of the book, but only of Emma, one of its characters. The horizon of expectation changed.

In biblical interpretation the goal is also to move to new, formative horizons, which will correct and surpass former perceptions. In the Synoptic Gospels 'parables of reversal' provide a striking example. In the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1–16) an initial reading might suggest natural human expectations of justice for 'those who have borne the burden of the day and its scorching heat' (v. 12). The expectation is that they will receive higher wages than those who joined the work-force at the eleventh hour (v. 8). Subsequently, however, readers might recognise that grace eclipses justice. The generosity of the employer becomes the new horizon of expectation. Other examples include the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14). Nowadays we might expect the Pharisee to be the less favoured character. But to the first audience the Pharisee did everything that he could to be right with God. The reversal of verdicts would come

[14] Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 3–14; and his *Text and Truth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp. 305–29.

[15] On horizon of expectation, see also David P. Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), pp. 148–69.

[16] See Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 3–6 and 60–6.

[17] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 25.

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as a devastating shock to many, who would come to perceive that grace turns human values upside-down. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–14) operates with the same dynamics. The expectation of the first hearers was that 'Good' and 'Samaritan' form a contradiction in terms. The old horizon of expectation becomes reversed by a new horizon.

The fourth thesis of Jauss relates 'the horizon of expectation' to 'the logic of question and answer', as Gadamer calls it.[18] Jauss explores the importance of the question, and he addresses 'the successive unfolding of the *potential* for meaning . . . embedded in a work and *actualized* in the stages of its historical reception'.[19] He proposes 'a history of the question and questioning'.[20] The question reaches 'beyond itself' by passing 'over the horizon of personal existence', and with its series of answers yields up 'the endlessness of dialogue'.[21] Like Waismann, he sees the question as 'the first groping step of the mind in its journeying that leads towards new horizons'.[22] A later author may reopen a question and dialogue by recognising the distinctive horizons of his or her predecessor. Like Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, Jauss looks for a work's becoming 'a momentous event'; and like Mikhail Bakhtin and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, he makes room for polyphonic discourse.[23]

In biblical interpretation it is a truism to speak of scripture as a revelatory and momentous event. Karl Barth, for one, rediscovered the importance of seeing the Word of God as eventful.[24] From another angle, Fuchs and Ebeling see the Word of God in scripture as occurring as a language-event (usually *Sprachereignis* in Fuchs, and *Wortgeschehen* in Ebeling).[25] Biblical scholars, furthermore, are accustomed to using the methods of tradition history or redaction criticism to detect distinct layers of the text, and the questions which each layer may pose. Gerhard Ebeling has seen biblical exegesis as closely linked to the history of the church, noting how each generation

[18] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 369–79.

[19] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 30 (my emphasis).

[20] Jauss, 'Question and Answer', p. 51.

[21] Ibid., pp. 53–4.

[22] Friedrich Waismann, *The Principles of Linguistic Philosophy* (London: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), p. 405.

[23] Jauss, 'Question and Answer', p. 71.

[24] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (14 vols, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957–75), I/1, §§4:1–3; 5:1–3; 6:3; and 8:1; also Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), pp. 28–96.

[25] Ernst Fuchs, *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie* (Tűbingen: Mohr, 1959), pp. 281–305 and Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1964), pp. 196–212; and Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 325–32; and *Theology and Proclamation* (London: Collins, 1966), pp. 28–31.

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corrects doctrines and movements by 'a fresh attention to the history of hermeneutics and the exegesis of Scripture'.[26] Jauss admits that the creativity of the question can be reduced when static doctrine closes the discussion prematurely. But Jauss declares, 'Pietism sought to oppose this tendency . . . by demonstrating its "constant application" to one's life'.[27]

Jauss' fourth thesis also considers the text as a *potential* source of meaning until the reader *actualises* or *appropriates* it, to make the potential meaning an actual, or completed, communicative act. This derives not only from the reader-response theory of Wolfgang Iser, but from a basic principle in linguistics formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure saw the 'language-system' (*la langue*) as a *potential* reservoir of meanings, which became actualised in acts of speech (*la parole*).[28]

This also applies to much of the claims about the Word of God in the Bible and the church. The Word of God, declares Barth, denotes 'a promise, a judgement, a claim on man by which God binds man to himself'.[29] A promise 'promises', as a formative act, when the addressee appropriates it. In common with John Zizioulas, Barth urges that the Word of God makes possible *communion* or relationship between God and humankind.[30] Performative or illocutionary language facilitates the formative power of the Bible.[31] William Tyndale rightly argued that scripture did more than merely inform. It changed our world by using world-changing acts, i.e. by what today we call performative language. He specifies eighteen speech-acts in twelve pages. The Bible 'makes the heart glad', promises, names, appoints, gives, declares, condemns, wounds, blesses, kills, cures, wakes, forbids, delivers, heals and so on.[32]

Jauss' fifth thesis argues that successive generations disclose the historically 'new'. He is not concerned with aesthetic or literary newness, as in formalism. Jauss looks back to the phenomenon of historicality in Heidegger and Gadamer. He urges: 'The interpreter must bring his own experience into

[26] Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition* (London: Collins, 1968), p. 29.

[27] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 78.

[28] John Lyons, *Semantics* (2 vols, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 238–45.

[29] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I:1, §5, p. 150.

[30] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, §§9–12, pp. 348–489; and John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 101–22.

[31] Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Proposals for a More Creative Agenda', in Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (eds), *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 107–42.

[32] William Tyndale, *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, in his *Doctrinal Treatises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Parker Society, 1848), pp. 8–9.

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play, since the past horizon of old and new forms . . . is only recognizable within the present horizon of the received work.'[33]

Again, this has parallels with biblical interpretation. If the interpreter 'must bring his own experience into play', this comes near to Rudolf Bultmann's insistence that 'To demand that the interpreter must silence his subjectivity and extinguish his individuality . . . is therefore the most absurd one that can be imagined.'[34] Writing from a different perspective from Bultmann, Bernard Lonergan insists equally,

> The principle of the empty head rests on a naive intuitionism . . . The principle of the empty head bids the interpreter forget his own views . . . [But] the less that experience, the less cultivated that intelligence . . . the greater the likelihood that the interpreter will impact to the author an opinion which the author never entertained.[35]

Liberation theologians also make pre-understanding axiomatic. In Miranda[36] this is indeed a 'socially formative' theme in the Bible.

Jauss' sixth thesis draws on a principle which is universally recognised in linguistics. It distinguishes between a *diachronic* analysis of meaning (through history) and a *synchronic* approach to meaning (a contemporaneous view of meaning). Jauss rejects a 'timeless' approach, understanding a 'true' diachronic perspective to embrace a series of 'synchronic cross-sections'.[37] He declares, 'The historicity of literature comes to light at the intersections of diachrony and synchrony.'

A parallel in biblical interpretation becomes more difficult to suggest, except for James Barr's work, likewise, of grounding biblical studies in established principles in linguistics.[38] He distinguished between diachronic and synchronic approaches, declaring: 'The etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning, but about its history.'[39]

Jauss' seventh thesis focuses on the 'social *formative* function of literature' (his emphasis).[40] He also appeals to Karl Popper's notion of progress in science. Like Paul Ricoeur, he longs for that which is *creative* in literature and

[33] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 34.
[34] Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Problem of Hermeneutics', in R. Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM, 1955), p. 255.
[35] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), p. 157.
[36] José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible* (London: SCM, 1977).
[37] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 37.
[38] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).
[39] Ibid., p. 109.
[40] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 40.

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in successive readings of literature. Society may be shaped by such creative reading. Also like Ricoeur, he sees that encounter with 'the Other', or alterity, constitutes a fundamental factor in formation. Later, Jauss will introduce his 'hermeneutics of the Other'.[41]

Gadamer implies encounter with the Other, when he speaks of formation as having goals *beyond the self*.[42] Emilio Betti also views what is 'not me' as formative, involving *listening, tolerance, patience and respect for the other*. Ricoeur rejects the narcissistic, introspective, individualism of René Descartes. He comments, 'Otherness . . . belongs . . . to the ontological constitution of selfhood.'[43]

With reference to theology, Ormond Rush declares, 'Openness to the other', the priority of the question and most of Jauss' agenda imply, for Christians, the 'theological priority of God as Other'.[44] He continues, 'A theological hermeneutics founded on the notion of reception . . . is a most appropriate hermeneutics for safeguarding divine alterity . . . Alterity therefore names the otherness or strangeness in the horizon of understanding God.'[45] He makes an excellent point.

To summarise, then, Jauss (1) dismisses value-neutral objectivism; (2) stresses the readers' horizon of expectation; (3) sees that this horizon changes and expands with formative effect; (4) stresses the value of question and answer, and appropriation, in actualising potential new horizons; (5) acknowledges the relation between interpretation and the readers' pre-understandings; (6) takes account of the diachronic or historical and synchronic or contemporary meaning; and (7) re-emphasises formative function of texts and works, and their creative effects on life. In theology this accords with (1) a theological, not value-neutral, reading of scripture; (2) biblical intertextuality and levels of reading; (3) biblically inspired formation, as readers' perceptions are changed; (4) scripture as eventful and polymorphous, inviting appropriation and communion with God; (5) engagement between the horizon of the biblical text and the horizon of the self; (6) interpretation of the past which facilitates address to the reader in the present; and (7) scripture speaks of God as Other, which requires listening and obedience.

[41] Hans Robert Jauss, *Wege des Verstehens* (Munich: Fink, 1994), pp. 11–28.
[42] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 11.
[43] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 317.
[44] Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1997), pp. 191, 293 and 294.
[45] Ibid., pp. 296 and 390; cf. pp. 291–315.

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Further concepts in Jauss' programme which relate to biblical formation

Provocation

We have not yet examined fully the concept of *provocation* or *challenge* in Jauss' work. Clearly Jauss envisages that historically new horizons of interpretation will transform or surpass those which represented earlier horizons of meaning. Ormond Rush comments, 'Deeper understanding comes about, not through some naive "fusion" of horizons, but through a constant differentiation of limited horizons on both sides of the dialogue.'[46] In Jauss' words the creative text stands 'in contrast to everyday perception . . . to rejuvenate cognitive vision'.[47] Jauss continues, 'The change of horizons between the first and second readings . . . [leads] the reader . . . in a perpetual act of anticipation.'[48] Distinguishing between successive horizons facilitates a new breakthrough in understanding.

This principle uncovers another theme in the formative power of the biblical writings. Gerhard Ebeling declares, 'According to Luther, the word of God always comes as *adversarius noster*, our adversary: It does not simply confirm and strengthen us in what we [already] think . . . This is the way the Word of God affirms our being and makes it true.'[49] The Bible must not be manipulated, as a mirror of our own wishes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly declares, 'If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my own nature. But if it is God who says where He will be . . . that place is the cross of Christ.'[50]

A new paradigm

Jauss has referred to Popper; now he considers Thomas Kuhn, especially his notion of paradigm-change.[51] Kuhn draws attention to the social and historical factors which underlie scientific premises. His work not only appears in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, but in a revised edition of 1970,

[46] Ibid., p. 301.

[47] Jauss, 'Poetic Text', in *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 142, where 'poetic' is used in Aristotle's sense of the term.

[48] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 145.

[49] Gerhard Ebeling, *Introduction to Theological Theory of Language* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 17.

[50] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Mediating on the Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1986), p. 45.

[51] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Histeria Calamitatum et Fortunatum Mearum. Or, A Paradigm Shift in Literary Study', in Ralph Cohen (ed.) *The Future of Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 112–28; see Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 174–202.

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and other works.[52] Like Jauss, Kuhn traces long periods of 'normal' research, followed by an insight that a new paradigm would suggest new 'rules of the game'. It will not entirely *displace* the old paradigm, but will clearly go *beyond* it. In his 'Logic of Discovery', he argues that genuinely creative discourse emerges, not at moments of normal routine, but 'only at moments of crisis, when the bases of the field are again in jeopardy', and the context for this is both *historical*, in relation to *particular times*, and *social*, in relation to *specific groups of people*.[53]

A classic example concerns Sir Isaac Newton's paradigm of motion and gravity, and Albert Einstein's more recent paradigm. Einstein's paradigm does not suggest that the Newtonian paradigm is now useless; it is well established. School physics quite adequately use Newton's paradigm. Einstein, however, addressed *new questions* which the Newtonian paradigm *cannot* answer. In Jauss' language, we need a new paradigm to deal with new questions and answers within a *new horizon of meaning*. (This is not to address his theory of 'incommensurability', about which I have serious reservations, when this is wrongly imported into theology.[54])

The search for a 'new paradigm' is not new in theology. In 1989 Hans Kűng and David Tracy called for 'a paradigm-change' in theology.[55] They seek a more sophisticated model of understanding, which asked how tradition and coherence relate to discontinuity and plurality, especially in hermeneutics and in life. In New Testament studies such a search continues. In 2007 Markus Bockmuehl insisted that biblical studies 'now requires urgent renovations by which new light and life could enter a number of vital, bricked-up windows'.[56] He then argues that reception history or *Wirkungsgeschichte*, suitably refined, might become a new way of seeing how the New Testament text 'connects with the reader'.[57]

[52] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2nd edn, 1970).

[53] Thomas S. Kuhn, 'The Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?', in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 4–5; cf. pp. 1–23.

[54] See G. Gutting (ed.), *Paradigms and Revolutions: Applications and Appraisals of Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1980); H. Sankey, *The Incommensurability Thesis* (Sydney: Avebury Press, 1994; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 171–3 and 182–3.

[55] Hans Kűng and David Tracy (eds), *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), pp. 18–21, 29–33 and 43–56.

[56] Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 25.

[57] Ibid., p. 68.

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Tom Wright similarly applies the need for a new vision to 'the dense and complex phrase "the authority of scripture", which now requires an "integrated view"'.[58] He suggests a new emphasis on 'prayerful listening' to the biblical text, through which we might discover a more meaningful notion of 'the authority of Scripture' than older theoretical debates were capable of formulating. Wright also suggests that the phrase 'authority of Scripture' is less adequate than the authority of 'God's work *through* Scripture' (his emphasis).[59] When students requested that my hermeneutics course should be moved from the third to the second year, this was largely on the ground that exposure to Gadamer and Ricoeur had suggested a new and (to them) unknown way of reading the Bible, namely through *listening* to it rather than simply scrutinising it, as if under the old Cartesian paradigm. They saw that the biblical purpose of *formation* took precedence over bare instruction.

'The whole meaning', or three levels of reading

Jauss introduces three 'Horizons of Reading' or 'Stages of Interpretation' in his essay on 'The Poetic Text within Change of Horizons of Reading', which discusses Baudelaire, and in *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*.[60] The first reading is aesthetic, pre-reflective, participatory and perceptive. The second is akin to exegesis in biblical studies, looking critically at the parts of a text, after using the first reading as its pre-understanding. The third reading is both historical and applicatory. It asks 'What did the text say?' and, in application, 'What does it say to me?'[61]

Jauss understands perception, interpretation and application as a 'triadic unity'. He admits that the three levels may be artificial and 'fabricated'.[62] But elsewhere he speaks of them as 'three successive readings'.[63] Jauss is cautious about the phrase 'fusion' of horizons, because this is an ideal goal, which is seldom realised in fact. He prefers to speak of a 'mediation' of horizons. He writes, 'The experience of the first reading becomes the horizon of the

[58] N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God – Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (London: Harper One & SPCK, 2005), p. 114.

[59] Ibid., p. 116.

[60] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, pp. 139–85; and Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), esp. pp. xiv–xv.

[61] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, pp. 139 and 146; cf. David Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), pp. 156–69.

[62] Jauss, *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 140.

[63] Ibid.

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second one.'[64] 'Application' is too often dismissed as unscholarly, but he defends *application*, partly by citing Gadamer's appeal to legal hermeneutics.

The perceptive, pre-reflective, reading allows the text to grasp the reader and, where relevant, to draw the reader into 'world'. It is seen as a work to be *lived through*, not simply thought about. I have distinguished elsewhere between the participatory stance of the reader, and the observer stance of the critic. Similarly Robert Fowler pleads for *critical readers* or *readerly critics*.[65] We may also compare this with Paul Ricoeur's '*post-critical naiveté*', although for Jauss it is his 'first' reading.[66] It is as if Jauss broadly follows Schleiermacher on 'feminine' or divinatory readings, and 'masculine' or comparative readings.[67]

The third, applicatory, reading, will include the experience of historical distance from the first readers, and will use the tools of 'suspicion', to borrow Ricoeur's term.[68] This asks, 'What does the text say to me?' This applicatory reading does not simply denote 'practical action' alone, 'but rather instead . . . broaden[s] the horizon of one's own experience vis-à-vis the experience of the other'.[69] By placing all three levels or horizons together, Jauss seeks to combine the aesthetic, critical, historical and applicatory into a comprehensive, unified meaning.

Does Jauss travel beyond Schleiermacher, Gadamer and Ricoeur? Schleiermacher saw that 'complete' meaning and understanding involved the hermeneutical circle of the parts and the whole; that a 'first' reading alone is inadequate; and that this 'whole' is grasped by *both* 'divinatory knowledge . . . the feminine strength in knowing people [and] comparative knowledge, the masculine'.[70] This is not greatly different from the intuitive-perceptive-aesthetic, while the 'comparative' is like the second level of reading. The first alone risks our becoming a 'nebulist'; the second alone risks our becoming a 'pedant'.[71] Schleiermacher comments, 'The idea of the work . . . can be understood only by the joint consideration of two factors: the content of the text and the range of effects.'[72]

[64] Ibid., p. 143.
[65] Robert Fowler, 'Who is "the Reader" in the Text?', *Semeia* 31 (1985), p. 9.
[66] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 349.
[67] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 150.
[68] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: an Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 27.
[69] Jauss, 'Poetic Text', in *Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 147.
[70] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, p. 150.
[71] Ibid., p. 205.
[72] Ibid., *Hermeneutics*, p. 151.

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Gadamer distinguished even more carefully between '*subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation)', and 'a third element, *subtilitas applicandi* (application)'.[73] He continues, 'We have come to see that understanding always involves something like applying texts . . . to the interpreter's present situation . . . one unified process.'[74] Application is 'an integral part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation'.[75]

Paul Ricoeur writes of 'the second faith of one who has engaged in hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism, post-critical faith . . . Faith, because it seeks, through interpretation, a second naiveté . . . the hermeneutical circle itself.'[76] For Ricoeur, this is bound up with willingness to listen.[77] The reader has passed through the process of *explanation* (*Erklärung*) and *understanding* (*Verstehen*), and this process culminates in the reader's '"making one's own" what was previously foreign'.[78] 'Appropriation . . . is addressed to me, *hic et nunc*'.[79] Schleiermacher, Gadamer and Ricoeur at least paved the way for Jauss' three levels of interpretation. Jauss places all this, however, in the service of the history of influences.

A challenge to biblical studies becomes clear when we ask how often 'application' or 'appropriation' explicitly occurs in most university lectures on biblical exegesis. Even biblical commentaries are often less explicit in this respect than one might imagine, especially if 'application' constitutes a test of authentic understanding. This is where reception history scores. If we consult the church fathers, medieval interpretation, Reformation exegesis and post-Reformation exegesis, we shall often find that application takes a prominent place in the task of interpreting the biblical text. Ormond Rush speaks of successive questions which 'have a claim on the reader'.[80] We must 'listen to' the text, and actualise a succession of readings. Understanding may be a long process, in which, as we look back at tradition, we often perceive ourselves as those of small stature, who 'stand on the shoulders of giants'.[81]

[73] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 307.
[74] Ibid., p. 308.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 28.
[77] Ibid., p. 27.
[78] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 91.
[79] Ibid., p. 92.
[80] Rush, *Reception of Doctrine*, p. 323.
[81] See David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants* (London and Atlanta, GA: Paternoster, 2006), p. xviii; cf. pp. xix–xxi.

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To summarise, Jauss uses the concepts of provocation, a new paradigm and levels of meaning, in literature. In theology, these correspond respectively to (1) encountering the word of God as our adversary, to correct, to shape and to reform us on God's terms; (2) searching for new paradigms in theology or biblical studies as Küng, Tracy, Bockmuehl and Wright propose or imply; and (3) exploring successive levels of interpretation, which include, as Gadamer and Wittgenstein imply, practical application.

Examples of reception history of the Bible and the church

I must finally try to show how reception history works in practice. Unfortunately, because of the confines of space, I can select only a small segment of examples, and leave the reader to see how these interact with the theoretical apparatus which has been set out above. The selection is limited to (1) one example from Jauss himself on Genesis; (2) one example from Brevard Childs on Exodus; (3) two examples from Ulrich Luz on Matthew; and (4) two examples from my own work, first on 1 Corinthians and second on 1 Thessalonians.

Jauss himself produces some concrete examples of reception history, but seldom on the biblical writings. One example concerns 'Questioning Adam' in Genesis 3:9.[82] The question, 'Adam, where art thou?', he says, is not strictly a question, for God knows where Adam is. It is ironic, but gives rise to the further question 'Why?' The first experience of God recounted in narrative is dialogic. As Barth sees it, 'In Adam, all human beings are called into question', and this provides a basis for human questions about God.[83] Barth treats the question 'applicatively' rather than 'reconstructively'. 'Where?' becomes a call for self-reflection, which implicates us all, as Wolfhart Pannenberg urges.

On the other hand, the question, Jauss comments, opens a road to emancipation. Like questions in Job, it 'reaches beyond itself, and passes over the horizon of its personal existence'.[84] Yet we must always ask, 'Can this text not be understood differently?' Many questions are 'activated only when a later author re-opens it by recognising an earlier author as his predecessor'.[85] Although he now moves increasingly away from Genesis 3:9, to focus on questioning as such, Jauss does give space to 'ultimacy' and to 'wonder'.[86] But once again his concern remains 'to discover something

[82] Hans Robert Jauss, 'A Questioning Adam: On the History of the Functions of Question and Answer', in 'Question and Answer', pp. 51–90.
[83] Ibid., p. 53.
[85] Ibid., p. 54.
[85] Ibid., p. 57.
[86] Ibid., p. 67.

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new', which will become 'a momentous event'.[87] He appeals to Mikhail Bakhtin and to Fyodor Dostoyevsky on polyphonic discourse. Jauss concludes by distinguishing between types of questions: 'questions with provocative, open-ended answers; questions that . . . pose a counter question; questions that implicitly provide their own answers . . . ; ironic questions that imply the opposite of that which is asked; absurd questions . . . to draw some meaning from their self-contradictory elements'.[88]

Jauss' argument includes the need for some 'constraint' or 'control' on reception history. Umberto Eco, however, suggests a more substantial one.[89] 'Open', 'literary' or 'poetic' texts may lend themselves to multiple treatments far more readily than 'closed', 'transmissive' or 'informational', or 'engineering' texts. Thus a huge challenge comes to biblical interpreters. The Bible contains *both*. Many psalms, poetic books and parts of Ezekiel and Revelation constitute 'open' or 'poetic' texts. Parts of the Synoptic Gospels and the epistles are 'closed', transmissive, texts. To mark the difference between these genres remains a crucial task.

Jauss also considers the Fall narrative as a whole, especially guilt and the 'curse' in Genesis 3:17.[90] But his concerns now become very wide, embracing the nature of myth and literal speech, the three levels of meaning, Job and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Again, the theme constantly emerges of 'new horizons of meaning'.[91]

A second example of the history of reception comes from Brevard Childs, although this lacks Jauss' theory-laden apparatus. Jauss does not appear in Childs' commentary. Yet Childs discusses the meaning of a passage for the rest of the Old Testament, for Judaism, for the New Testament writers, and the church fathers, the Reformers, and the post-Reformation era, and for the flowering of biblical criticism. Moreover the influence is not unidirectional but often marks a reciprocal influence between texts and interpretations.

The passage to be considered is Exodus 3:1–15.[92] The Old Testament context provides a 'remarkable mixture of ordinary elements of human experience with the extraordinary. Moses is shepherding the flock . . . he

[87] Ibid., pp. 69 and 70.

[88] Ibid., p. 89.

[89] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 136–9; cf. Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 68–86; and Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 6–14.

[90] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Three Case Studies in Aesthetic Application', in *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), vol. 68, pp. 95–120.

[91] Ibid., p. 101.

[92] Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 60–89.

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notices a common desert bush on fire . . . "The angel of Yahweh appeared to him" . . . The old life of shepherding is ended; the new life of deliverer was beginning.'[93] The divine seeks to transform the human. Like Jauss, Childs then considers what kind of question, if a question at all, is 'What is his name?' (vv. 13–15): 'Is this a genuine question?'[94] He notes the Hebrew, 'I will be who I will be', and the word-play on the name of God: *ehyeh-yahweh*, which is 'paradoxically both an answer and a refusal of an answer'.[95] He concludes that the reality of God will be seen in what Israel experiences of his purposes and future action. *Today*, we may see how God relates to our future experiences of life.

In the New Testament, Matthew cites Exodus 3:6 in 22:32, and Synoptic parallels Mark 12:26; and Luke 20:37. There 'He is not God of the dead, but of the living', which is taken to allude to resurrection. Acts 7:30 also refers to the call of Moses, when Stephen shows how often Israel rejected God's messengers. Childs compares the LXX 'I AM' and the Hebrew 'I will be' with Rev 1:8, the God 'who is, and who was, and who is to come' (Greek, *ho ōn kai ho ēn kai ho erchomenos*).[96]

Most of the major church fathers 'left at least one treatise on the subject'. For many, Christ was 'the angel' (e.g. Justin, *Trypho* 59–60; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3:6, 4:10; Ambrose, *On Faith* 1:13. Augustine wrestled constantly with the passage. Aquinas and the scholastic writers saw the LXX translation as referring to God as immutable Being or Essence. Among the Reformers, Calvin sees an allusion to 'the eternal Son of God', and to the importance of the incarnation. Zwingli saw a connection between God's attributes and his role as Creator. Childs concludes his eight stages of interpretation: 'Revelation is not information about God . . . but an invitation to trust'.[97] This speaks to *today's reader*.

Ulrich Luz is probably the most important New Testament scholar to have practised reception history explicitly, in his three-volume commentary on Matthew (four volumes in German).[98] I shall select only two examples. First, on Matt 1:18–25 he gives an interpretation which stresses the testimony to the Holy Spirit (v. 18); questions about the knowledge of Joseph of Mary's pregnancy, his protection of Mary from suspicion of adultery; and the angel's

[93] Ibid., p. 72.
[94] Ibid., p. 74.
[95] Ibid., p. 76.
[96] Ibid., p. 82.
[97] Ibid., p. 89.
[98] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), vol. 3; *Matthew 8–20* and *Matthew 21–28* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001 and 2005), vol. 3.

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message to Joseph. The Spirit is the 'sexual partner' of Mary.[99] The reference to forgiveness of sins is important. The conception of the Messiah as Saviour is widespread in Judaism, and the use of 'Emmanuel' belongs to christology. The whole birth narrative remains significant for Matthew.[100] Matt 1:18–25 relates to Matt 28:16–20. The virgin birth is also important as Old Testament fulfilment.

In the history of influences the quotation from Isaiah 7:14 became a central issue in Christian polemic against Judaism. But in a different situation 'a text gains new life in a new context'.[101] Roman Catholic exegesis raises the question of the perpetual virginity of Mary, even after the birth of Jesus. But a passage which was primarily christological came to be overlaid with Mariological questions and interests. Luz comments, 'Later it becomes an honorific statement not about Jesus but about Mary.'[102]

In the history of the church, this passage leads to questions about the pre-existence of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. Since the nineteenth century, however, the virgin birth has come under widespread attack. It was said that this theme was originally pagan, and was transferred to Jesus. For Matthew, however, it was a 'conceptual basis' for understanding Jesus as 'Immanuel'.[103] *Today*, this helps us to see how Jesus is 'God with us' and 'a *real* acting of God with Jesus *in* history' (his emphasis).[104]

Our second example concerns the visit of the Magi in Matt 2:1–12. In his section on interpretation Luz argues that 'for Matthew the adoration of Jesus by the Gentiles and his rejection by the Jerusalemites is in the foreground'.[105] It anticipates the worship of the disciples. It also stresses God's intervention and plan.

On the history of influence Luz discusses the two traditions of the origin of the Magi from Arabia, on the basis of Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 66:6, and a theory of Persian origin, largely on the basis of art. Although Matthew seems to suggest their arrival up to two years after the birth of Christ, Augustine suggested the thirteenth day after the birth of Christ. In the medieval period the Magi came to be seen as respective representatives of Shem, Ham and Japheth. In the Middle Ages they were also seen as kings, perhaps on the basis of Isaiah 60:3 and Psalm 72:10–11. The particular names Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar appeared first in the Middle Ages. Later Caspar becomes a

[99] Luz, *Matthew* 1–7, p. 120.
[100] Ibid., p. 122.
[101] Ibid., p. 123.
[102] Ibid., p. 125.
[103] Ibid., p. 127.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

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beardless young man; Melchior is a bearded old man; Balthasar is dark, and eventually black. Later tradition recounts their return by ship. *Today's readers* may identify themselves with the Magi.

Elsewhere in his commentary, Luz discusses the history of influence in general. It includes 'the history, reception, and actualizing of a text in media other than the commentary', including sermons, canonical law, hymns, art, and the life and sufferings of the church.[106] Texts crucially modify church traditions. Such a history of reception is also attempted by Ulrich Wilckens in the EKK series on Romans, and in the Blackwell series of commentaries.[107]

A fourth example comes from my Commentary on 1 Corinthians. In *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (2000), I select only one example out of many, namely chapter 1, especially 1:18–25.

First, the Apostolic fathers stress that the cross constitutes an affront to unbelievers (Ignatius, *Ephesians* 18:1), though Justin insists that the cross can be commended to all those who have sound reason (Justin, *Apology* 1:68). Second, in the era of the church fathers, Clement of Alexandria naturally, as a 'Christian Gnostic', emphasised the 'higher' wisdom of Paul.[108] Tertullian, the 'twice-born', argues that the wisdom of God stands in contrast with the wisdom of the world, and is not simply higher wisdom.[109] Origen, the theologian, discusses the cross as involving a full doctrine of salvation.[110] Cyprian, under the Decian persecution, stresses that Christ brings the 'power of God'.[111] Lactantius links epistemology in Socrates with the Pauline willingness to recognise one's own ignorance, and to dispel illusion.[112]

After Chalcedon, Athanasius grounds the wisdom–folly contrast in christology (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 15). Ambrosiaster cites the virgin birth as an example of supposed 'folly' (Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles* in CSEL 81:16). Augustíne sees human blindness as a cause of regarding the cross as folly, and stresses the sovereign power and grace of God (Augustíne, *The City of God* 10:28).

[106] Ibid., p. 95.

[107] Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer,* Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 6/1–4 (Neukirchen-Vlyn: Neukirchener Verlag, and Zűrich: Benzinger Verlag, 1978–82); and Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). There are others in each series.

[108] Clement, *Stromata*, 1.3,18, 19; 6.6

[109] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection* 3; *Against Marcion* 5.5.

[110] Origen, 'Fragments on 1 Corinthians', *Journal of Theological Studies* (1908), p. 235, sections 6–8; and also Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.16.

[111] Cyprian, *Testimonies* 2.

[112] Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.2, 9, 16.

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We can readily see that each interprets features of the passage to support his own outlook. The Apologist seeks rational debate; the 'Gnostic' seeks a higher wisdom; the 'twice-born' sees discontinuity and contrast between the world and the gospel; the theologian discusses an explicit doctrine; and so on. I go on to explore the passage in the medieval era and at the Reformation. Martin Luther understandably relates glory in the cross to the Heidelberg Catechism. John Calvin, following Augustine, points to human blindness as a result of sin. Bengel shows how the message of the cross cuts across all of human achievements, even achievements of religiosity. This addresses *today's readers*, for whom also (in Jüngel's words) 'God defined himself as love on the cross of Christ'.[113]

I consider, finally, one example from my *1 and 2 Thessalonians through the Centuries*.[114] In 1 Thess 5: 19 Paul exhorts the readers, 'Do not despise prophesyings'. Today there is a widespread popular view of prophecy either as predictions of the future or, more usually, as spontaneous, staccato-like pronouncements, often by members of a church congregation. Ambrosiaster refers to interruption of worship and discussion, although he states that 'prophecy' could take the form of biblical exposition.[115] Chrysostom and Augustine also associate prophecy with expounding scripture.

Thomas Aquinas explicitly declares that prophecy is undertaken 'by those who explain divine doctrine'. Verse 19 means, 'Do not despise preachers'.[116] In the Reformation era John Calvin insists that 'prophecies' mean 'the art of the interpretation of Scripture . . . the interpretation of Scripture properly applied to the people present'.[117] Prophecy is also a kind of preaching. Calvin makes the same point in the *Institutes*. Paul does not carry his readers away from the Word, i.e. scripture (*Institutes* 1.6.2; 1.9.3). The Roman Catholic Chancellor of Douai, Estius, similarly argues that prophecy is not 'private revelation', but official teaching.[118]

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the same tradition continues. Matthew Henry argues: 'By prophesyings, here we understand the preaching of the word, the interpreting and applying of the scriptures. We must not

[113] Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, p. 200.

[114] Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: Through the Centuries* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2011).

[115] Ibid., p. 165.

[116] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians and the Letter to the Philippians* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1969), p. 52.

[117] John Calvin, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL, and Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1999), p. 60.

[118] Estius (Willem H. van Est) *In Epistolam Primam B. Pauli Apostoli ad Thessalonicenses Commentarius* (Moguntiae: Sumptibus Francisci Kirchhemii, 1858), vol. 2, p. 592.

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despise preaching . . . We must search the Scriptures.' John Gill speaks here of the public preaching of the word. John Wesley comments: 'Prophesyings . . . that is preaching, for the Apostle is not speaking of extraordinary gifts' (*Notes on the Whole Bible*, p. 694). In the nineteenth century James Denney calls the prophet 'a Christian Preacher'.[119] Reception history challenges *today's readers* to rethink the popular notion of what 'prophecy' might be.

Jauss might appeal here to a continuity of meaning in a tradition, or perhaps speak of new horizons of meaning. But with the rise of the Pentecostal movement, one can either welcome new horizons of expectations, or regret a radical departure from tradition. Before and after the first decade of the twentieth century, this phenomenon is evaluated differently. Reception history at least gives us the chance to hear all sides of the case. There are now many and varied examples of reception history.[120] Nevertheless most demonstrate the formative effect of the Bible on readers.

[119] James Denney, 'Thessalonians', in *The Expositor's Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), p. 239.

[120] E.g. Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 229–74, on the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matt 21:33–41.

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