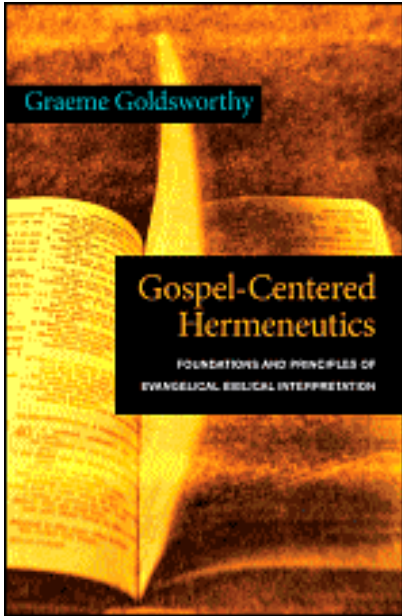


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Goldsworthy, Graeme

Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation

Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007. Pp. 341.
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This book is a reworked version of a hermeneutics course taught at Moore Theological College (Australia). It develops and advocates a biblical theology that reads all Scriptures through Christ's person and work. One of its guiding theses is that "the regressive nature of much modern hermeneutics under the influence of the latest philosophical moods has contributed to the eclipse of the gospel in biblical interpretation" (13). The book is targeted for students and pastors.

Several presuppositions that not all, even among evangelicals, will agree with, as Goldsworthy recognizes (42), underlie the argument. Among these are that the main purpose of reading the Scriptures is to know God and his will and that we know God through his Son, whom we know through the Scriptures (16; see also 49, 218); that the ability correctly to interpret the Scriptures implies salvation and sanctification, a "hermeneutical conversion" (18); that, despite difficulties, "the Scriptures are essentially clear" (17; see also 24, 168, 195, 197); and that "the principles of hermeneutics are to be found within the Scriptures themselves" (22).

The book consists of nineteen chapters divided into three parts. The first part presents the foundations of an evangelical hermeneutics and what a gospel-centered hermeneutics is (69). Such hermeneutics is then briefly surveyed through the Scripture (70–85).

The second part walks the reader through the centuries to examine, mainly through secondary sources, challenges to evangelical hermeneutics. The aim “is simply to highlight the ease with which either potential or actual crises can occur in the way the Bible is read and understood.” Although this part is not meant as a history of hermeneutics, it does offer a historical survey of hermeneutics in the Western tradition all the way to the present, including a critical evaluation of some trends in the evangelical world. For Goldsworthy, “The Reformation represented a largely successful attempt to eradicate the foreign philosophical influences that had shaped Catholicism” (297). Although Goldsworthy mentions the usual authors in modern hermeneutical debates (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, etc.), it is refreshing to encounter also the likes of Origen, Hugh of Saint Victor, Aquinas, and others.

The third part’s purpose is to reconstruct an evangelical hermeneutics based on parts 1 and 2. Evangelical hermeneutics should be apologetic and self-critical (181–82). Hence, the author surveys the different areas involved in hermeneutics and the communication of the gospel: the literary dimension of the text, history, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, biblical and systematic theology, and contextualization. He stresses how the principles of the Reformers can be reinterpreted and reused today, with an emphasis on Calvin’s contribution. For Goldsworthy, “The Reformed or Christian theistic hermeneutic was given a formative—one could say definitive—expression in the opening chapters of Calvin’s *Institutes*” (185). This part concludes with a chapter titled “The Hermeneutics of Christ,” which is a summary of Goldsworthy’s approach to biblical theology, his Christology, and a proposal for a Christ-centered hermeneutics and its implications (298). For Goldsworthy, all Scriptures point to Christ and should be interpreted in the light of his person and work (249, 252, 256, 303). Not all will agree that, *in fine*, “the ultimate interpretation of all literature, of every spoken or written word, can only be achieved in the light of Christ” (63 n. 7). Yet Goldsworthy is to be commended for attempting to articulate a Reformed approach of the Scriptures within the history of hermeneutics and to integrate contemporary hermeneutical theories in the defense of his biblical theology. One will find here healthy reminders that even evangelicals have presuppositions in reading the Scriptures and of the objective aspects of the Christian faith (165, 168–69, 205, 262, etc.). The book ends with a short epilogue based on the book of Revelation, a bibliography, and an index of names and of references. Unfortunately, there is no subject index, which, given the material covered, somewhat hinders the use of the book.

Despite the qualities of the work, not all will agree with the different threads that are weaved into it. One of them is that the New Testament authors all shared the gospel-centered hermeneutics described by Goldsworthy. After all, when Jesus explains all things in the Scriptures that concerned him (if Luke 24:27 is referred to on 252), it does not

necessarily mean that *every text* of the Scriptures talks about him. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to investigate whether the principles of hermeneutics found in the New Testament are reproducible and should be reproduced today. I am not quite sure either that the apostolic approach presented here was so quickly eclipsed in the subapostolic period, to be recovered, even if imperfectly, by the Reformers, especially Calvin, as the author maintains. Indeed, when studying history, a choice, whether conscious or not, is often made between stressing the continuities or the discontinuities. True enough, there are methodological and epistemological discontinuities between the likes of Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, or Calvin, but it would have been useful, to strengthen the case of the book, to interact more with the continuities. Thus, though Origen's lasting influence is mentioned (96), it would have been pertinent to mention his view that Christ is the unifying factor of the two Testaments and the key to reading the Old Testament from the New, that the mystical (spiritual) sense is the christological sense of the Scriptures, or his claim to reproduce a biblical model, too (Prov 22:20; 1 Cor 2:6; *Peri Archôn* 4). There is at least some continuity with Goldsworthy's claim that the whole Old Testament is about Christ, "not merely a few selected texts" (252). Another interesting example that is left out is Hugh of Saint Victor, dealt with somewhat positively (105) and his claim that the key to reading the mysteries of the Old Testament is Christ (*Didaskalikon* 4.6).

This last comment points to a methodological issue. Although Goldsworthy deals with Origen, Augustine, Hugh, Aquinas, Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Hirsch, Ricœur, and others, he never actually quotes them or evaluates them from their own writings or refers to their works (see the bibliography). Granted, Goldsworthy does mention that he will depend on secondary sources "to show some of the reactions and evaluations occurring in recent scholarly comment, particularly by evangelicals" (87; see also 107), but the use of secondary sources goes beyond showing such reactions and evaluations to describe and evaluate the primary authors. It is a methodology used throughout the book, even in part 3, when the author "reconstructs" evangelical hermeneutics, with the notable exception of Calvin, who is quoted from the *Institutes* (185–90).

Furthermore, although Goldsworthy covers a lot of material, some discussions are absent that might have been more important. Granted, space is limited, but in promoting his view of biblical theology the author might have strengthened his case and anticipated objections by mentioning at least once the Septuagint and the consequences of its use by the early church, even by Augustine, or contemporary intertextual studies when dealing with the use of the Old Testament in the New, or even the empirical data related to the actual use of the Scriptures in history. After all, the church may have a canon, but it remains mostly the possession of a privileged few. Well into the Middle Ages, most

people, monasteries, and churches did not use or have access to the whole Bible. “The Bible is a book and as such must be treated as a book” (35). Maybe, but historically it has not been a book for most. An interaction with other (evangelical) proposals for the center of biblical theology (salvation, theodicy, the kingdom of God, the glory of God, etc.) or with recent works in Old Testament theology (Barr, Brueggemann, Goldingay, etc.) would have been appropriate, too.

All in all, Goldsworthy is to be commended for his clear presentation and his attempt to take history and modern studies into account. This book will be a welcome addition to the library of those who share the author’s premises, but I am not sure it offers enough contradictory discussion to convince those who do not, which is unfortunate, given the importance of the question and the author’s original approach.