

Zoë. Bennett. *Using the Bible in Practical Theology: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2013. Ashgate, 2013. 160 pages. \$39.95.

The introduction says that this book is for pastors and lay people, but how many lay people are college-educated with western philosophical backgrounds? The academic background of the author is obvious from the beginning. For an academic familiar with discussions of interpretation, part I of this book is not a problem, but someone new to the topic might find it difficult to get through, and reach frequently for their dictionary. One of Bennett's main aims is to point the reader toward self-discovery and self-awareness. It is unfortunate that the book is steeped in academic language. It forces a large portion of the audience to work harder to access the self-examination process. Different viewpoints and reflections are used like parables to get us to think critically in part I.

In part II, John Ruskin's life, context, and philosophy are observed and used as a case study for readers to use to self-examine their own contexts and interpretive biases. It is good for us to realize that there is no such thing as a "bare" fact. Bennett points out that we have cultural contexts and connotations that we automatically and subconsciously attach to words (Chapter 6). With this awareness, there are parts of this book that require us to suppress quick judgment and try to look at complex issues from multiple angles.

Ruskin is not only a case study, but also one who is a keen observer of others and himself. As a professor, he teaches lessons that can be generalized for anyone's use. Ruskin is someone who engaged in multiple areas of study and practical life. Bennett refers to different aspects of life as 'texts,' and Ruskin as one who read multiple texts side-by-side.

Bennett reminds us that the "possibility of being misled is ever-present" in interpretation. To move towards truth, we should move through what she calls a pastoral cycle: seeing (the Bible and life), telling, acting, and return to seeing (chapter 9). In practical theology, people are not like texts. They can respond and give us feedback and help us see more clearly.

Bennett gives a helpful reminder that prophecy is not all about fore-telling, but also speaking to our current situations. Part III invites the reader to self-examination and reflection. There isn't a prescription here, but an offering of tools to use. Two chapters focus on thought-provoking situations: the words and actions of a former leader in the church in response to the Occupy London movement and the Palestinian Kairos Document. Bennett pushes the reader to consider several serious interpretation issues of the Bible and how we live. They can reveal to us what sorts of biases we have on these issues. Do we give enough time to the pastoral cycle process? Are we looking at issues with a bigger picture in mind? Are we passionate or ambivalent towards the Bible?

Bennett argues for avoiding the extremes of tyranny of experience and tyranny of the text. She is unapologetic about her recommendations beginning by centering on self. Self-reflection is part of the process of PhD candidacy, which Bennett advises. To her, the use of the Bible should not be a hunt for generalized principles, but about connecting the Bible and life in observation – seeing, not making.

I have a different view of Biblical interpretation than Bennett's. My academic training has led me away from the centering Bible use around the reader's response. I did find parts of the book helpful, but also found myself critical of its lack of historical context in the discussions. Some significant topics are referenced, but not expounded on in this book. That might be due to the assumption that readers will look at the end notes and bibliography to pursue their own line of questioning like a well-disciplined student. Overall, I did not personally find this book as

helpful as I had hoped because I had already gone through much of the personal and interpretation assessment Bennett encourages.

Jinny Chieu