

1 & 2 PETER

D O U G L A S H A R I N K



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SERIES PREFACE

Near the beginning of his treatise against gnostic interpretations of the Bible, *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus observes that Scripture is like a great mosaic depicting a handsome king. It is as if we were owners of a villa in Gaul who had ordered a mosaic from Rome. It arrives, and the beautifully colored tiles need to be taken out of their packaging and put into proper order according to the plan of the artist. The difficulty, of course, is that Scripture provides us with the individual pieces, but the order and sequence of various elements are not obvious. The Bible does not come with instructions that would allow interpreters to simply place verses, episodes, images, and parables in order as a worker might follow a schematic drawing in assembling the pieces to depict the handsome king. The mosaic must be puzzled out. This is precisely the work of scriptural interpretation.

Origen has his own image to express the difficulty of working out the proper approach to reading the Bible. When preparing to offer a commentary on the Psalms he tells of a tradition handed down to him by his Hebrew teacher:

The Hebrew said that the whole divinely inspired Scripture may be likened, because of its obscurity, to many locked rooms in our house. By each room is placed a key, but not the one that corresponds to it, so that the keys are scattered about beside the rooms, none of them matching the room by which it is placed. It is a difficult task to find the keys and match them to the rooms that they can open. We therefore know the Scriptures that are obscure only by taking the points of departure for understanding them from another place because they have their interpretive principle scattered among them.¹

1. Fragment from the preface to *Commentary on Psalms 1–25*, preserved in the *Philokalia*, trans. Joseph W. Trigg (London: Routledge, 1998), 70–71.

As is the case for Irenaeus, scriptural interpretation is not purely local. The key in Genesis may best fit the door of Isaiah, which in turn opens up the meaning of Matthew. The mosaic must be put together with an eye toward the overall plan.

Irenaeus, Origen, and the great cloud of premodern biblical interpreters assumed that puzzling out the mosaic of scripture must be a communal project. The Bible is vast, heterogeneous, full of confusing passages and obscure words, and difficult to understand. Only a fool would imagine that he or she could work out solutions alone. The way forward must rely upon a tradition of reading that Irenaeus reports has been passed on as the rule or canon of truth that functions as a confession of faith. “Anyone,” he says, “who keeps unchangeable in himself the rule of truth received through baptism will recognize the names and sayings and parables of the scriptures.”² Modern scholars debate the content of the rule on which Irenaeus relies and commends, not the least because the terms and formulations Irenaeus himself uses shift and slide. Nonetheless, Irenaeus assumes that there is a body of apostolic doctrine sustained by a tradition of teaching in the church. This doctrine provides the clarifying principles that guide exegetical judgment toward a coherent overall reading of scripture as a unified witness. Doctrine, then, is the schematic drawing that will allow the reader to organize the vast heterogeneity of the words, images, and stories of the Bible into a readable, coherent whole. It is the rule that guides us toward the proper matching of keys to doors.

If self-consciousness about the role of history in shaping human consciousness makes modern historical-critical study critical, then what makes modern study of the Bible modern is the consensus that classical Christian doctrine distorts interpretive understanding. Benjamin Jowett, the influential nineteenth-century English classical scholar, is representative. In his programmatic essay “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” he exhorts the biblical reader to disengage from doctrine and break its hold over the interpretive imagination. “The simple words of that book,” writes Jowett of the modern reader, “he tries to preserve absolutely pure from the refinements or distinctions of later times.” The modern interpreter wishes to “clear away the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon” the words of scripture. The disciplines of close philological analysis “would enable us to separate the elements of doctrine and tradition with which the meaning of Scripture is encumbered in our own day.”³ The lens of understanding must be wiped clear of the hazy and distorting film of doctrine.

Postmodernity, in turn, has encouraged us to criticize the critics. Jowett imagined that when he wiped away doctrine he would encounter the biblical text in its purity and uncover what he called “the original spirit and intention of the authors.”⁴ We are not now so sanguine, and the postmodern mind thinks

2. *Against the Heresies* 9.4.

3. Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Essays and Reviews* (London: Parker, 1860), 338–39.

4. *Ibid.*, 340.

interpretive frameworks inevitable. Nonetheless, we tend to remain modern in at least one sense. We read Athanasius and think him stage-managing the diversity of Scripture to support his positions against the Arians. We read Bernard of Clairvaux and assume that his monastic ideals structure his reading of the Song of Songs. In the wake of the Reformation, we can see how the doctrinal divisions of the time shaped biblical interpretation. Luther famously described the Epistle of James as a “strawy letter,” for, as he said, “it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.”⁵ In these and many other instances, often written in the heat of ecclesiastical controversy or out of the passion of ascetic commitment, we tend to think Jowett correct: doctrine is a distorting film on the lens of understanding.

However, is what we commonly think actually the case? Are readers naturally perceptive? Do we have an unblemished, reliable aptitude for the divine? Have we no need for disciplines of vision? Do our attention and judgment need to be trained, especially as we seek to read scripture as the living word of God? According to Augustine, we all struggle to journey toward God, who is our rest and peace. Yet our vision is darkened and the fetters of worldly habit corrupt our judgment. We need training and instruction in order to cleanse our minds so that we might find our way toward God.⁶ To this end, “the whole temporal dispensation was made by divine Providence for our salvation.”⁷ The covenant with Israel, the coming of Christ, the gathering of the nations into the church—all these things are gathered up into the rule of faith, and they guide the vision and form of the soul toward the end of fellowship with God. In Augustine’s view, the reading of scripture both contributes to and benefits from this divine pedagogy. With countless variations in both exegetical conclusions and theological frameworks, the same pedagogy of a doctrinally ruled reading of scripture characterizes the broad sweep of the Christian tradition from Gregory the Great through Bernard and Bonaventure, continuing across Reformation differences in both John Calvin and Cornelius Lapse, Patrick Henry and Bishop Bossuet, and on to more recent figures such as Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Is doctrine, then, not a moldering scrim of antique prejudice obscuring the Bible, but instead a clarifying agent, an enduring tradition of theological judgments that amplifies the living voice of scripture? And what of the scholarly dispassion advocated by Jowett? Is a noncommitted reading, an interpretation unprejudiced, the way toward objectivity, or does it simply invite the languid intellectual apathy that stands aside to make room for the false truism and easy answers of the age?

This series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures. The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances upon the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian

5. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 362.

6. *On Christian Doctrine* 1.10.

7. *On Christian Doctrine* 1.35.

scripture. God the Father Almighty, who sends his only begotten Son to die for us and for our salvation and who raises the crucified Son in the power of the Holy Spirit so that the baptized may be joined in one body—faith in *this* God with *this* vocation of love for the world is the lens through which to view the heterogeneity and particularity of the biblical texts. Doctrine, then, is not a moldering scrim of antique prejudice obscuring the meaning of the Bible. It is a crucial aspect of the divine pedagogy, a clarifying agent for our minds fogged by self-deceptions, a challenge to our languid intellectual apathy that will too often rest in false truisms and the easy spiritual nostrums of the present age rather than search more deeply and widely for the dispersed keys to the many doors of scripture.

For this reason, the commentators in this series have not been chosen because of their historical or philological expertise. In the main, they are not biblical scholars in the conventional, modern sense of the term. Instead, the commentators were chosen because of their knowledge of and expertise in using the Christian doctrinal tradition. They are qualified by virtue of the doctrinal formation of their mental habits, for it is the conceit of this series of biblical commentaries that theological training in the Nicene tradition prepares one for biblical interpretation, and thus it is to theologians and not biblical scholars that we have turned. “War is too important,” it has been said, “to leave to the generals.”

We do hope, however, that readers do not draw the wrong impression. The Nicene tradition does not provide a set formula for the solution of exegetical problems. The great tradition of Christian doctrine was not transcribed, bound in folio, and issued in an official, critical edition. We have the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, used for centuries in many traditions of Christian worship. We have ancient baptismal affirmations of faith. The Chalcedonian definition and the creeds and canons of other church councils have their places in official church documents. Yet the rule of faith cannot be limited to a specific set of words, sentences, and creeds. It is instead a pervasive habit of thought, the animating culture of the church in its intellectual aspect. As Augustine observed, commenting on Jeremiah 31:33, “The creed is learned by listening; it is written, not on stone tablets nor on any material, but on the heart.”⁸ This is why Irenaeus is able to appeal to the rule of faith more than a century before the first ecumenical council, and this is why we need not itemize the contents of the Nicene tradition in order to appeal to its potency and role in the work of interpretation.

Because doctrine is intrinsically fluid on the margins and most powerful as a habit of mind rather than a list of propositions, this commentary series cannot settle difficult questions of method and content at the outset. The editors of the series impose no particular method of doctrinal interpretation. We cannot say in advance how doctrine helps the Christian reader assemble the mosaic of scripture. We have no clear answer to the question of whether exegesis guided by doctrine is antithetical to or compatible with the now-old modern methods of

8. *Sermon* 212.2.

historical-critical inquiry. Truth—historical, mathematical, or doctrinal—knows no contradiction. But method is a discipline of vision and judgment, and we cannot know in advance what aspects of historical-critical inquiry are functions of modernism that shape the soul to be at odds with Christian discipline. Still further, the editors do not hold the commentators to any particular hermeneutical theory that specifies how to define the plain sense of scripture—or the role this plain sense should play in interpretation. Here the commentary series is tentative and exploratory.

Can we proceed in any other way? European and North American intellectual culture has been de-Christianized. The effect has not been a cessation of Christian activity. Theological work continues. Sermons are preached. Biblical scholars turn out monographs. Church leaders have meetings. But each dimension of a formerly unified Christian practice now tends to function independently. It is as if a weakened army had been fragmented, and various corps had retreated to isolated fortresses in order to survive. Theology has lost its competence in exegesis. Scripture scholars function with minimal theological training. Each decade finds new theories of preaching to cover the nakedness of seminary training that provides theology without exegesis and exegesis without theology.

Not the least of the causes of the fragmentation of Christian intellectual practice has been the divisions of the church. Since the Reformation, the role of the rule of faith in interpretation has been obscured by polemics and counterpolemics about *sola scriptura* and the necessity of a magisterial teaching authority. The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series is deliberately ecumenical in scope, because the editors are convinced that early church fathers were correct: church doctrine does not compete with scripture in a limited economy of epistemic authority. We wish to encourage unashamedly dogmatic interpretation of scripture, confident that the concrete consequences of such a reading will cast far more light on the great divisive questions of the Reformation than either reengaging in old theological polemics or chasing the fantasy of a pure exegesis that will somehow adjudicate between competing theological positions. You shall know the truth of doctrine by its interpretive fruits, and therefore in hopes of contributing to the unity of the church, we have deliberately chosen a wide range of theologians whose commitment to doctrine will allow readers to see real interpretive consequences rather than the shadow boxing of theological concepts.

Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible has no dog in the current translation fights, and we endorse a textual ecumenism that parallels our diversity of ecclesial backgrounds. We do not impose the thankfully modest inclusive-language agenda of the New Revised Standard Version, nor do we insist upon the glories of the Authorized Version, nor do we require our commentators to create a new translation. In our communal worship, in our private devotions, in our theological scholarship, we use a range of scriptural translations. Precisely as scripture—a living, functioning text in the present life of faith—the Bible is not semantically fixed. Only a modernist, literalist hermeneutic could imagine that this modest

fluidity is a liability. Philological precision and stability is a consequence of, not a basis for, exegesis. Judgments about the meaning of a text fix its literal sense, not the other way around. As a result, readers should expect an eclectic use of biblical translations, both across the different volumes of the series and within individual commentaries.

We cannot speak for contemporary biblical scholars, but as theologians we know that we have long been trained to defend our fortresses of theological concepts and formulations. And we have forgotten the skills of interpretation. Like stroke victims, we must rehabilitate our exegetical imaginations, and there are likely to be different strategies of recovery. Readers should expect this reconstructive—not reactionary—series to provide them with experiments in postcritical doctrinal interpretation, not commentaries written according to the settled principles of a well-functioning tradition. Some commentators will follow classical typological and allegorical readings from the premodern tradition; others will draw on contemporary historical study. Some will comment verse by verse; others will highlight passages, even single words that trigger theological analysis of scripture. No reading strategies are proscribed, no interpretive methods foresworn. The central premise in this commentary series is that doctrine provides structure and cogency to scriptural interpretation. We trust in this premise with the hope that the Nicene tradition can guide us, however imperfectly, diversely, and haltingly, toward a reading of scripture in which the right keys open the right doors.

R. R. Reno

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Too long ago now (and I am grateful for their patience) Rusty Reno and Rodney Clapp invited me to contribute this volume to the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. I agreed on the basis of a desire to explore the message of 1 Peter more deeply, though (I'll confess) I was largely unaware of the treasures that awaited in the much neglected second epistle. The opportunity to write a commentary on these two very different letters has proven to be a rich and satisfying theological adventure, for which I am very grateful.

The adventure began in the 2005 Senior Seminar in Theology at the King's University College and continued in the 2007 Senior Seminar. I am grateful to the students in those seminars for their dedication to reading 1–2 Peter with me, asking the most important questions, and producing valuable research projects. Jonathan de Koning, Rachel Stolte, Jamie Ostercamp, and Lindsay Vanderhoek deserve special mention for their challenging and outstanding work.

In the summer and fall of 2005 I was granted a sabbatical leave by the King's University College and a residential membership at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton. I am grateful to both of those institutions for their great generosity, which enabled me to do most of the work on the commentary on 2 Peter during my stay at CTI. I am especially thankful to the CTI staff, and its director William Storrar, for providing such a wonderful context in which to do theological research and writing—truly a theologian's sabbatical dream come true. Of course, what makes the dream is the characters in it, and here I must give thanks to the other scholars in residence at CTI while I was there, in particular Markus Bockmuehl, Chris Mostert, Anne Marie Reijnen, Robert Pope, and Steve Walton, each of whom contributed, through critical readings, conversations, research tips, and friendship to my understanding of theology, commentary writing, and 2 Peter.

Opportunities to present some of this material were generously provided by the Canadian Theological Society, the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association,

and the amazing theological community of the parish of St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg. I am grateful to Rev. Dr. David Widdicombe for the invitation to participate in and contribute to the St. Margaret's theological consultations in 2007 and 2008 and for making me an honorary member of the parish.

A number of people read smaller or larger portions of this commentary and provided very necessary critical perspectives and comments: the above-named CTI colleagues and Jane Barter-Moulaison, Tim Fretheim, and Debby Harink. Thanks to each of them for their good judgment and patience. Rusty Reno and George Sumner, series editors, each read the entire manuscript and provided significant critical suggestions for improvement. Though they graciously required nothing of me, nevertheless on many points in the commentary I learned from their engagements, on most I thought through the issues again, and on some I made substantial changes. In the end, alas, each of them would no doubt have written a very different commentary from mine (especially on 1 Peter), and no doubt a better one too. If this commentary is finally less or other than it should be, it is not for lack of trying on the part of Rusty or George or any of my other faithful early readers. All gratitude to them; all final responsibility to me.

The editorial staff at Brazos Press are a delight to work with. Lisa Cockrel makes sure that actual progress is made on a manuscript and that it gets done. David Aiken provides outstanding service as a manuscript editor; I am very fortunate to benefit from his careful and insightful work for the second time. Thanks to Brazos, its people, and its vision.

My work is always accompanied and made possible by colleagues, family, and friends. Arlette Zinck, dean of the faculty of arts at the King's University College, not only always encourages my work with words and friendship, but also honors and often protects the time I need to do it—time that might otherwise be spent on many pressing administrative tasks. My colleague in theology, Steve Martin, constantly graces me with good conversation, good theology, and friendship. My dear friend and fellow traveler in theology and the good life, Roy Berkenbosch, always lifts my spirits, and often drinks them—a dram fine Dutchman he is. Debby—companion of my heart, of my thoughts, of my love for Christ and the church, for more than thirty-five years—always bears with me, believes in me, encourages me, blesses me. God bless her, and our two wonderful daughters, Elizabeth and Allison.

I dedicate this book to four of my elders in life and in faith. My father and mother, Elmer and Alida Harink, instructed me in the scriptures and the Christian life from the very beginning. I thank God for their constancy, love, and witness. David Demson is my *Doktorvater*, from whom I learned Calvin, Barth, Frei, and all of the most important theological moves I know. I hope this work does him honor, though he may not agree with it all. Finally, Lou Martyn has blessed me not only with his work on the apocalyptic Paul, without which I can no longer imagine theology, but also with his friendship and encouragement. At one critical juncture in my journey with Paul, when Lou saw me taking a wrong turn, he spoke up: "O foolish Canadian, who hath bewitched thee?" I needed that. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

Two epistles more different from one another it would be difficult to find in the entire New Testament.

In the one, 1 Peter, we have an extended exhortation for the church to take up, dwell in, and live out of its identity as “the elect, the exiles of the Diaspora” (1:1 DH), a chosen people called out from the wider social and political orders to embody and display God’s transforming holiness and love as its peculiar mission among the nations. In this messianic calling, the church, like the Messiah, will often encounter disdain, opposition, and even persecution from those who continue to live under the reign and by the rules of other gods and lords. In carrying out their mission, the people of the Messiah must therefore prepare themselves for suffering. At the very heart of this first epistle stands the figure of Jesus Christ as the one who suffers. As the suffering Messiah he defines the very character of messianic life. The people that has been called by God and redeemed through the Messiah’s suffering and death, that shares in his resurrection and fullness of life, does not shrink from the wider world or go into hiding among the nations. It shares in the suffering and destiny of its Lord joyfully and full of confidence and lives without fear in the societies in which it finds itself. For the followers of Jesus know that God’s justice is being done through them, and will be done for them, exactly because God demonstrated his justice for them and for the world in the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah. Their sharing in the Messiah’s suffering, redemption, and resurrection life is their participation in, their enactment of, the hidden revolution in which God is bringing about a new creation. The greatest revolutionary power of this letter comes at that point where its words are likely to strike us as the most objectionable—in the “household code” (2:13–3:8) in which Peter’s instruction is summed up in the repeated phrase “be subordinate.” As we shall discover, difficult though that instruction is to swallow in our time, the revolutionary history of the world in its messianic sense begins with that phrase.

The term “messianic,” appearing frequently in the commentary, needs some explanation. Why not simply “Christian”? What is signaled with the term “messianic”? First and most obviously the term links the people and way of life designated *messianic* with the *Messiah* Jesus. The “messianic” in the New Testament is not a free-floating concept awaiting our bestowal of attributes. On the contrary, it is fully enacted, summed up, and defined by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As the Messiah, he *is* “the messianic.” The messianic is originally, truly, and definitively revealed—“apocalypted”—in him. Nevertheless, the concept also points to the varied but concrete theological, political, and economic messianic expectations that were current among Jews in the time of Jesus: in the gospel accounts the devil tempts Jesus to enact a messiahship in accordance with those very expectations. But Jesus fundamentally interrupts, suspends, and reconfigures them. Jesus trusts the word, will, and way of the Father as he discerns the godly shape of his messiahship on his journey from Bethlehem to Golgotha. In fact, radical trust in the Father is itself the very enactment and definition of the messianic. At the same time, Jesus does not substitute a “spiritual” or “religious” messiahship in the place of social, economic, and political ones. Rather, trusting in the Father, he enacts in his concrete historical life and death, within the concrete historical conditions of his time, an *alternative sociopolitical messianic life* and calls his followers to participate in and imitate that messianic life as their baptismal share in his own being and act as the incarnate Word, crucified, risen, exalted, coming again in glory. Of course, we turn most naturally and immediately to the canonical Gospels to discern just what that alternative sociopolitical vision looks like in Jesus’s life and in the life of his followers. Nevertheless, we can also get a clear picture of it through a careful reading of 1 Peter.

Some readers of this commentary may worry that my presentation of the relationship between the messianic people of God and the wider world is insufficiently dialectical, that is, that it presents that relationship in too antithetical a manner. There is some truth to that judgment, but I think it is misplaced. Were I developing a general treatise on the church-world relationship I would indeed have to show greater sensitivity to the complexities intrinsic to shaping, say, a theology of culture or a political theology. In a commentary on 1 Peter, however, I am in the first place obliged to follow the text of this particular epistle. Peter’s letter is not very dialectical. The believers to whom he writes are being scorned, abused, and made to suffer in various ways at the hands of their unbelieving neighbors and rulers. Peter instructs them how to live in that situation. If we are to be true to the letter then, we will more likely find ourselves exploring the themes of messianic martyrdom than those of how Christians transform societies in which Christian influence is taken for granted or perhaps even welcomed. Indeed, I will show how Peter’s messianic/apocalyptic vision might lead us to reconsider some of our dearest beliefs about how Christians go about influencing and transforming the world.

The messianic interpretation of 1 Peter that I offer here is informed in large measure by those strands of theological tradition that resonate most deeply with

the messianic sociopolitical vision of the epistle. Prominent in this regard is the Radical Reformation tradition, represented for me primarily by the work of John Howard Yoder. The reader familiar with Yoder's work will detect the presence of his messianic/apocalyptic theology throughout my exposition of the letter, even in those places where Yoder is not directly quoted or identified. But not only Yoder: also Karl Barth, whose apocalyptic/messianic theology, whether in the *Römerbrief* or in the *Church Dogmatics*, equips us to plumb the theological, christological, and ethical deeps of 1 Peter like no other. Again, while Barth is only infrequently quoted or referenced in the commentary, his influence is pervasive and will be obvious to those familiar with him. While working on this commentary, I discovered (but in relation to Paul rather than Peter) the work of (secular?) Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), in particular his revolutionary “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in which he develops a concept of the messianic, messianic time, and messianic agency. In his own way Benjamin grasps profoundly the kind of messianic existence that Peter calls forth from the people of the Messiah. Benjamin's theses have come to haunt this work in ways I could not have anticipated, and I commend them to the reader's consideration.¹

Among the number of modern commentaries on 1 Peter that I use, I rely especially on two superb comprehensive works to guide me through the issues of text, language, history, and culture: Achtemeier 1996 and Elliott 2000. Boring 1999 is also invariably useful, and Calvin 1963 never fails to illuminate, instruct, and kindle a passion for God and his reign. Luther 1967 reveals his love both for the epistle and for the one to whom it testifies.

When we come to 2 Peter we find ourselves in an atmosphere very different from the first epistle, one not frequently breathed by Western (Protestant) Christian readers and that therefore requires a kind of acclimatization. What shall we think, for example, when the language of *gnōsis* (“knowledge”) rather than *pistis* (“faith”) predominates; when salvation is thought of as rescue from the corruption that comes from desire; when eschatological fulfillment is rendered as participation in the divine nature; when the Christian life is described most fully in terms of knowledge and virtue (*aretē*); when the transfiguration (rather than, say, the cross and resurrection) is put forward as the decisive christological event; when heretics are unremittingly (and ungraciously?) condemned; when the final parousia comes as a great cosmic conflagration? In view of all these things, shall we join Ernst Käsemann in his unrelenting theological attack (a “critical cross-examination,” as he called it) on the epistle, concluding with him that 2 Peter is irredeemably

1. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–64. Michael Löwy's *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"* (London/New York: Verso, 2005) provides a helpful translation and guide to Benjamin's “Theses.”

“Hellenistic,” “from beginning to end a document expressing an early Catholic viewpoint . . . perhaps the most dubious writing in the canon”?²

That is one option. But it is not the one I pursue in this commentary. How shall we breathe the air of 2 Peter? How shall we become acclimatized to its quite obvious Hellenism? One way is to learn from those who are already used to it. And so I turn to Eastern Orthodoxy. For, which tradition has plumbed to greater depths (sometimes to the point of danger) the mystery of participation in the divine life? And which has meditated with more concentration and profundity—in both word and icon—on the transfiguration of our Lord? And where shall we find the intellectual and spiritual riches of Hellenism so thoroughly redeemed through subsuming and taking them up into the greater and more powerful riches of New Testament apocalypticism? Where, but in Orthodoxy? Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas on deification, the Fathers (McGuckin 1986) and icons³ on the transfiguration, Sergius Bulgakov and David Bentley Hart on apocalyptic eschatology⁴—these became my primary commentary on 2 Peter. By taking in some of the air of this tradition I was able to develop the lungs I needed to climb the mountain of 2 Peter; and climbing 2 Peter in turn opened up for me a vista on Orthodoxy.

In the first instance, however, I was delivered from Käsemann’s hyper-Protestant judgment against 2 Peter not by reading in Orthodoxy, but by reading the outstanding 1983 commentary on the epistle by Richard Bauckham. Bauckham provides a definitive rejoinder to Käsemann. Bauckham’s own reading of 2 Peter may be characterized as a kind of cautious hellenization thesis—but certainly not hellenization pure and simple. Bauckham demonstrates persuasively that what we find in 2 Peter is a “surprising combination of Hellenism and [Jewish cosmic] apocalyptic” (1983: 154).⁵ That is the lead I followed, and the one that led me to explore some of the treasures of Orthodoxy as a means of discerning and understanding the theological treasures of 2 Peter. At the same time, both Calvin and Luther were again constant and illuminating companions in my journey through the epistle.

At the heart of 2 Peter is a profound and passionate declaration of the divine justice, authority, and glory of Jesus Christ revealed in the transfiguration, of

2. Ernst Käsemann, “An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology,” in his *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 169.

3. See Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005); and Solrunn Nes, *The Uncreated Light: An Iconographical Study of the Transfiguration in the Eastern Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

4. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

5. Cf. Richard Bauckham, “2 Peter,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 923–27. I also found Kraftchick 2002 and Harrington 2003 especially helpful.

his imminent glorious coming that will purify and transform all of creation and make it the home of righteousness, and of the absurdity and indeed great danger of the heresies that deny these truths. In view of these things it is regrettable that 2 Peter often hardly registers on the radar of theologians and ordinary Christian readers of scripture. I hope this commentary encourages another and deeper look at this important text.

Some readers may be troubled that I straightforwardly refer to the author of each of the epistles as Peter. On that, I simply follow the canonical text, and then also follow the connections from the Peter of the epistles to the other canonical accounts of Peter in the Gospels and Acts.⁶ I assume the theological legitimacy of both of those moves without making a historical-critical judgment one way or another about the authorship of the epistles. Arguments about authorship are legion in the commentaries.

In the end, the reader of this book may well sense certain theological tensions between the commentaries on the two epistles, as between the epistles themselves. If so, then she or he will be sharing in my own experience. I have not tried to resolve those tensions completely—though perhaps something of a clue to the resolution might be found in the transfiguration as the apocalypse of Christ reigning in full divine glory. But such a resolution will have to be explored on another day. In the meantime I pray that God will use this commentary to guide the reader, in some small measure, into the fullness of truth in Christ Jesus, to whom each epistle is an indispensable witness.

6. See Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 462–76.