

Richard Bauckham. *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011. 166 pages. \$19.

Bauckham seeks to induct his readers into a regular practice of political interpretation because it is important for exegetes to gain an understanding of the social relevance of the Bible. Written in a very engaging and jargon-free style, this book can be very helpful to pastors, homiletics, seminarians and divinity school students, and ethicists and theologians seeking to understand how to incorporate insightful, imaginative political interpretation into one's exegetical practice. This book can also serve community organizers and other church and civic community leaders, many of whom find themselves on the defensive in conversation with pastors, lay people, and politicians who argue that the Bible is not political and that the Church "has no business in politics." *The Bible in Politics* is a full-throated, much-needed defense of the political relevance of *all* biblical material.

Bauckham argues *against* placing artificial restrictions on the political relevance of biblical material, insisting instead that the meaning of texts is *always* dependent upon its varied contexts. Readers should appreciate the biblical material in the following culturally specific contexts: 1) linguistic, 2) immediate literary, and 3) the wider literary context. For the text to mean something to us today, we must pay equal attention to our 4) contemporary context and finally, and most importantly, to read the text with an eye towards the 5) complete canon of scripture, recognizing that canonical unity can emerge in a dialectic of diversity. While not everything in Scripture has equal weight, all needs to be weighed; that is, we need to take account of all the biblical material and justify prioritizing some material over other material. To avoid manipulating texts to support our preconceived attitudes and assumptions, Bauckham suggests that the exegete include the work of interpreters whose political and economic circumstances are different from his or her own.

Taking up six different Scriptural texts, including Lev 19, Prov 31, and Pss 10 and 126, Bauckham skillfully demonstrates how his method works. For example, the author takes on Psalms 10 and 126, which are protest songs of lament, complaint, and desperation. Bauckham first explores the linguistic and literary forms of a people in vehement protest against their enemies. Israel's desperation derives not just from personal sorrow but from social and political weakness. The psalmist's solidarity and therefore ours should be with the politically weak, like orphaned and vulnerable children. The wider literary context is addressed when he takes up questions about evil, suffering, and death in apartheid-era, war-ravaged Namibia, by considering the work of Bishop Zephaniah Kameeta, a leading liberation theologian, organizer of the BIG (Basic Income Grant—guaranteed income for the poor) program, and Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia. In 1976, in his text *Why, O Lord?*, Bishop Kameeta rewrote Psalm 10 from the perspective of one ministering on the ground to legions of poor, war-weary, suffering people caught in the middle of a war against apartheid in South Africa. Bauckham ends by joining the psalmist's curse against his enemies to Jesus' counsel to turn vengeance over to God and forgive our enemies.

Bauckham then turns his attention to the treatment of themes—freedom, for example—throughout the whole of Scripture. To discern the general thrust and major components of the Bible's treatment of freedom or any topic, interpreters must do two things: report the actual positions reached by particular biblical writings and discern the larger direction in which biblical thinking is moving.

I would use this book in an Introduction to Homiletics class, a Preaching and Community Organizing class, a Christian Social Ethics class, or as a treat for an advanced Sunday school or Bible Study class. I would also find a way to introduce this book as a challenging text for an ecumenical or interfaith Clergy Caucus or Clergy Reading group and as an addition to any community organizer's reading list. Most importantly, this text should also be used by pastors to regain their voice and power when they find themselves in congregations that eschew any "political" talk. Bauckham delivers a clear and convincing case for adding political interpretation to one's exegetical practice and preaching.

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