

Consensus

Volume 31

Issue 1 *Preaching the Gospel in Canada in the 21st Century*

Article 14

5-1-2006

Introducing the Bible

Christian Eberhart

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Eberhart, Christian (2006) "Introducing the Bible," *Consensus*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol31/iss1/14>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Introducing the Bible (with CD-ROM)

John Drane

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005

730 pages, \$ 49.00 Paperback

John Drane, a New Testament scholar who currently is professor of practical theology at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), is already well known to the scholarly world and beyond because of his two works *Introducing the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) and *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 2001). The publisher now endeavors to combine these reader-friendly resources into the impressive volume *Introducing the Bible*, complete with a CD-ROM.

The *first part on the Old Testament* starts with a chapter that, among other things, outlines the history of biblical Israel, briefly deals with specific features such as its double identity as Old Testament and Hebrew Bible, and mentions literary genres and canonical structure. Drane then focuses on the actual biblical narrative which he retells in its canonical order. He continues with a section addressing general themes such as theological concepts (for example, “The Living God”, “God and the World”) and matters of worship. He concludes the Old Testament part with a chapter on the value and authority of the Old Testament as Christian Scripture.

Drane opens the *second part on the New Testament* with a concise outline of the historical and religious context of Early Christianity such as the Greco-Roman world and Judaism in the Roman Empire. He then presents the biographical periods of the life of Jesus (birth and early years, ministry, death, and resurrection) and Jesus’ message. A discussion of the actual New Testament literature follows: the four canonical Gospels are presented in chronological order (Mark, Luke, Matthew, John); the contents of Acts as an account of the spread of Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world; several chapters on Paul in which the apostle’s life, missionary work, and letters (including the Deutero-Pauline writings). The remaining New Testament writings are discussed in three chapters: one chapter on the Christian church in the context of its Jewish origins, and two dedicated to John’s Revelation and his three letters. Drane ends the New Testament part of his book with a chapter devoted to modern (“historical-critical”) interpretative methods and their critical assessment.

Drane's *Introducing the Bible* is a remarkable resource for several reasons. The author has the ability to present difficult and complex scholarly discussions as well as their dry data about biblical texts in an accessible and concise fashion. Many of these explanations are presented in comprehensive paragraphs separate from the main text. When making his own opinion explicit, Drane typically questions several of these scholarly findings without fully dismissing them (e.g., pp. 263-5 on the question whether the Old Testament Flood story is based on older Babylonian accounts; pp. 650-51 and 656-59 on the authenticity of Deutero-Pauline letters).

In addition, the entire book offers an appealing and very helpful layout. Photos, maps, and timelines illustrate the main text while tables, graphs, drawings, etc. capture important issues (I note a mistake on p. 205 where the photograph of the verso page of the Aramaic Elephantine Papyrus Cowley 30 is reproduced upside down as well as right-left reversed). Finally, the book includes a useful CD-ROM featuring the text of the work (with hyperlinks to biblical references) and additional materials (e.g., chapter summaries, review questions) – a helpful tool considering that the book does not contain any index.

My primary critique of the book is its tendency to marginalize serious scholarship vis-à-vis the general presentation of the biblical material. Because the discussion of scholarly issues is contained in separate paragraphs, some readers might regard them as secondary. In fact, Drane himself often concludes such paragraphs by questioning or relativizing the scholarly issues. The reader might thus be left under the impression that biblical interpretation is possible without scholarly inquiry. Several of Drane's own conclusions may, of course, be questioned themselves: Notwithstanding scholarly proposals that the flood story in Gen 6-9 is a compilation of a Jahwist and a Priestly account, is not either one based on Babylonian (and even older Sumerian) accounts? Drane rightly observes theological differences between the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* and the Old Testament version (pp. 263-5), but once these are taken into consideration, the fact that the story line of Gen 6-9 as such is derived from older predecessors predating the Old Testament versions by approximately one millennium can hardly be denied. Furthermore, Drane explicitly states that he writes his Old Testament Introduction "from a self-consciously Christian perspective" (p. 338; cf. p. 355). This might account for the lack of Jewish perspective in some of his

discussion of scholarly opinions so that, for example, his explanation of Old Testament covenant (pp. 55-6) or sacrifice (pp. 324-5) is barely representative of the more recent discussion informed by crucial Jewish scholarly contributions. Broadening the perception of scholarly voices would then also benefit the corresponding chapter on “Jesus’ death as a sacrifice” (pp. 441-42). Finally, this explicit Christian perspective is the main reason why the “other continuation” of the Hebrew Bible in the form of Rabbinic Judaism is never seriously presented – Drane contents himself with introducing the two parts of the Christian Bible.

Nevertheless, I recommend this valuable and very reader-friendly resource to all lay people interested in the study of the Christian Bible, and to beginning students.

Christian A. Eberhart
Lutheran Theological Seminary
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Presumed Guilty:

How the Jews Were Blamed for the Death of Jesus

Peter J. Tomson (translated by Janet Dyk)

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005

160 pages, \$15.00 Paperback

Peter J. Tomson, Professor of New Testament and Patristics in the Theological Faculty at the University of Brussels (Belgium), has chosen an important topic for his scholarly work. In his book *Presumed Guilty: How the Jews Were Blamed for the Death of Jesus*, he acknowledges the deplorable reality of Christian anti-Judaism and investigates its roots in Early Christianity, and particularly in New Testament writings. Aimed at a wider audience, this book is an abridged version of Tomson’s earlier scholarly work entitled *‘If This Be from Heaven ...’: Jesus and the New Testament Authors in Their Relationship to Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

Tomson tries to explain historical phenomena by establishing their historical context. Thus he outlines the development of Judaism from the 6th century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E. and shows how the