

5-1-2005

# History of biblical interpretation: a reader

Oscar Cole-Arnal

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Cole-Arnal, Oscar (2005) "History of biblical interpretation: a reader," *Consensus*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol30/iss1/10>

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](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

## **History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader**

William Yarchin

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2004

444 pages, \$31.59 Hardcover

Since the French Enlightenment western Christianity has experienced the rise and scholarly dominance of the historical-critical study of sacred Scripture. In its wake has emerged a series of negative reactions to this new methodology, the most well known in North America being the rise of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fundamentalism. More broadly conceived this fundamentalism lashed out against all forms of what was called “liberalism” in church life and doctrine. In the field of Biblical studies, this polemic has manifested itself habitually in attacks on the historical-critical method of Biblical exegesis which it remains convinced has found its home in the churches’ seminaries. In our day perhaps the most volatile form this conflict takes in our own denomination lies in the continuing debate on just how inclusive our church can be when it comes to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. Invariably the public form of the debate, as we in the Eastern Synod experienced in the summer of 2004, hinged around how one interprets the Bible. Although our synod did adopt several resolutions, these in no way settled such a polarizing issue but rather the church body acted courageously to make the dialogue serious and open. Not surprisingly the debate involves how one interprets Scripture as the Word of God.

This context underscores with utmost clarity the value of William Yarchin’s recent collection *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader*. In this much needed addition to scholarship Yarchin sets the stage by providing a wider bibliography and giving the reader a substantive introduction to the development and evolution of how Christian believers interpreted those texts they came to call Scripture. As well, he positions the Christian movement right where it belongs (as an offshoot of Jewish faith) by giving thoughtful attention to pre-rabbinic and rabbinic interpretations of sacred texts. However, the meat and chief purpose of the book follows: namely relevant selections of primary source material from roughly the first centuries BCE/CE to the present. By his use of judicial, editorial and historical lead-ins the author provides selections of how believers used different methodologies to reach their interpretative conclusions.

Thus, readers taste directly how rabbis wrestled with the text; how Justin Martyr used his Bible (chiefly what Christians later called the “Old Testament”) to “prove” to Gentile Romans that Jesus was the Christ; how varying moods of interpretation were utilized, like typology, allegory, etc.; how medieval theologians debated different modes; how the Reformation and humanism challenged older ways; and finally, how the modern debate emerged and evolved. In all of this, we the readers see first hand that there has never been one historical way that the churches have interpreted their sacred texts.

Appropriately author William Yarchin summarizes his efforts: “In the postmodern world, no single approach to biblical interpretation can claim exclusive validity or relevance.... The world of Biblical interpretation has ever been rich and manifold, and so it continues into the twenty-first century.” (xxix-xxx) I am convinced that this perspective and the wealth of source material he provides can serve all churches by providing a dose of humility to challenge our personal certitudes and thus open the way to fruitful dialogue among the now polarized.

Oscar Cole-Arnal  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

### **Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World**

Enrique Nardoni (trans.by Seán Charles Martin)

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004

343 pages, \$34.29 Hardcover

*Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* provides a comprehensive examination around the theme of justice in the Jewish and Christian canonical documents, while at the same time giving attention to the wider social context of the “Biblical World.” Indeed Nardoni’s chapters on the much ignored ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian notions of justice stand out as among the strongest in his book. Also the author deserves much applause for the comprehensive character of the study. Not only does he cover the vast wealth of Biblical writings, but also he provides a solid chronological framework for the reader. Further, he summarizes fairly accurately