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# Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects

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would be important in decisions to add or drop certain books, nor, more precisely, how Jesus Christ might in fact function in decisions of this kind as "true and final canon".

Indeed, much neglected in this volume are the critical theological developments that gave rise to the formation of the agreed upon core collection of Jewish writings in pre-Christian centuries and the agreed upon core collection of Christian writings during the second and third centuries CE. This latter is the period which William Farmer, in *Jesus and the Gospels*, refers to as the "classical phase" in Christian canon history, because of the pivotal role Irenaeus played at this time in defending the church's core convictions about Israel's God and Israel's scriptures against Marcion's radical anti-Judaism. For a proper account of these enormously consequential theological developments older works like that of Hans von Campenhausen (*The Formation of the Christian Bible*) are still indispensable.

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## **Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects**

Ulrich Luz

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994

x + 108 pp.

This book is a revised set of lectures originally given in English at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, by the Swiss New Testament professor Ulrich Luz. Luz is best known for his commentary (still in progress) on the Gospel of Matthew; two tomes of which have already been published in German, the first of which is now also available in English. More specifically, it is the incorporation into this commentary of the history of interpretation or *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text as an integral aspect of the text's meaning that Luz has especially emphasized. The book under review reflects both aspects of this larger work and, indeed, might easily serve as an accessible introduction to the governing concerns behind it.

Despite the title, the book is not really about the Gospel of Matthew, at least not in any comprehensive or overarching fashion. Only two of the book's five chapters have as their principal theme particular aspects of the Gospel of Matthew, and in neither case is the topic discussed a fundamental feature of Matthew's narrative per se. Chapter three treats the so-called "mission instructions" in Matthew 10, while chapter four is essentially a discussion of the figure of Peter in Matthew 16:18. In both

cases, the Gospel of Matthew serves more as a source of examples for the larger hermeneutical argument of the book than as the book's specific focus.

The book is really about hermeneutics or the problem of understanding how a text like the Gospel of Matthew can be held to be meaningful beyond the circumstances of its original composition and, furthermore, how the meanings ascribed to the text by later generations are not simply arbitrary or to be considered strictly beside the point for an historically minded readership. Thus the first chapter of the book addresses the limits of the historical-critical method: essentially, the tendency of this approach to make the text a thing of the past. The second chapter then explains how the method of interpretation practised by Luz, which is attentive to the "history of [meaning] effects" or *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text, makes possible "a new dimension of understanding". Lest one think, however, that Luz is simply opposed to the use of historical criticism in biblical interpretation, the fifth and final chapter of the book returns, after the two aforementioned case studies in Matthew 10 and 16, to "the question of truth" and "the value of the historical-critical method".

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## **Comfort One Another, Reconstructing the Rhetoric and Audience of 1 Thessalonians**

Abraham Smith

Louisville: Westminster Press, 1995

Abraham Smith's book represents a new direction in biblical studies. Drawing upon the tools of literary criticism, he closely observes the contours of language, pays attention to the rhetorical context of the period, and thinks hard about the relationship of the text of 1 Thessalonians to readers.

In the first chapter, he develops principles as viable tests for a valid interpretation, thereby charting a course for interpretation. These principles include not doing violence to a text by ignoring some or all of its parts, communicating an interpretation in an understandable fashion, and bringing new insights or direction to the interpretation.

His section on readers is helpful to anyone engaged in biblical interpretation. First, he demonstrates that all critical readers are "constrained to read as biased or interested readers" (17). Leaving behind the classical empiricist notion of a "passive receptive mind", Smith offers an "interactionist model". He demonstrates how each writer "recontextualizes" an ancient writer. Further, Smith asserts that the modern interpreter has this