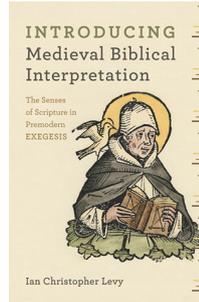


Book Review

Ian Christopher Levy.

*Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation:
The Senses of Scripture in Premodern Exegesis.*
Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2018.
306 pages. \$29.99. ISBN: 9780810148807.

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Throughout the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first century, the growing field of the history of biblical interpretation has been gaining attention by both biblical scholars and students of history. While patristic interpretation has been a perennial interest among scholars, medieval interpretation gained recognition through Beryl Smalley's and Henri de Lubac's inaugural studies.

Ian Christopher Levy, professor of historical theology at Providence College, contributes to this field by providing an accessible overview of medieval biblical interpreters and their methods in *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation*. Levy accomplishes no small task in examining interpreters spanning one-thousand years, from the patristic-era Origen to Jean Gerson in the dawn of the Reformation. Following an introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters that cover individual interpreters. An eighth chapter provides a case study by examining medieval interpretations of the papacy. The conclusion reflects on the contributions of medieval exegetical methods for the church today. The book has a helpful index of quotations from biblical, ancient, and medieval sources, as well as an index of modern authors.

To set the stage for examining medieval interpretation, Levy's opening chapter provides key background material by providing an overview of the patristic interpreters, including Origen, Diodore, Theodore, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Cassian, Jerome, and Isidore of Seville. Levy also pays particular attention to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and the four senses, both of which are important for understanding medieval exegetes. For each interpreter, Levy helpfully first provides the interpreter's exegetical theory, followed by examples from their actual exegesis. Levy continues this pattern of introducing the interpreter then providing examples of their interpretation through the book.

In the second chapter, Levy introduces interpreters in the early Middle Ages. He reviews the exegesis of the Venerable Bede, Rabanus Maurus, Claude of Turin, Sedulius Scottus, Haimo of Auxerre and Heiric of Auxerre. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to Bede and Haimo. In the third chapter Levy engages the interpreters of eleventh-century cathedral schools. A few pages introduce Lanfranc of Bec, while the majority of the chapter is dedicated to Bruno the Carthusian and his commentaries on the Psalter and Pauline epistles.

Levy devotes the following three chapters to twelfth-century biblical interpretation.

Chapter four examines the monastic interpretation of Benedictine monks Robert of Tomberlain, Bruno of Segni, Honorius Augustodunensis, Rupert of Deutz, and Hildegard of Bingen. Next, Levy explores the exegesis of the Cistercian monks Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry. For each monk, Levy provides brief background material and highlights of interpretative method, then provides examples of exegesis drawn from the Song of Songs. The fifth chapter is devoted to the interpreters Hugh, Andrew, and Richard of the Victorine school, paying particular attention to their view of history and the senses, as well as their interaction with Jewish scholars. Chapter six, covering the cathedral schools at Leon and Paris, introduces the methods and writings of four Peters – Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Peter Comestor, and Peter Chanter. The *Glossa Ordinaria* is also treated in this chapter.

Levy moves his discussion into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by examining the exegesis coming out of the universities in his seventh chapter. Along with providing background material on late medieval universities, Levy introduces the major interpretative players of this era: Stephen Langton, Thomas de Chobham, Robert Grosseteste, Hugh of St Cher, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Peter Olivi, Henry of Ghent, Nicholas of Lyra, John Wycliffe, Jean Gerson, and Paul of Sainte-Marie. In reviewing each author's biblical interpretations, Levy pays particular attention to their understanding of the senses of scripture.

In chapter eight, Levy departs from the pattern of introducing interpreters and

instead turns to how a particular topic – the papacy – was variously interpreted among medieval interpreters. This helpful chapter provides a good example of diverse ways in which exegesis was applied, and how different interpreters arrived at diverse conclusions surrounding the nature of the papacy. Along with illuminating views of the papacy, Levy helpfully shows that medieval interpreters were not one monolithic block in their interpretations of Matthew 16, they exhibited a range of understandings.

In his insightful concluding chapter, Levy takes up the questions he posed in his introductory chapter, namely in a modern world of interpretation focused on the historical-grammatical method, what role does pre-critical exegesis play? What can these medieval interpreters contribute to contemporary dialogue? Levy builds on David Steinmetz's lament that the historical-critical method's focus on the human author sacrifices the insights of medieval interpretation drawn from multiple meanings of the divine author. Evangelicals concerned with aspects of the historical-critical method will particularly welcome this discussion. Arguing for the relevance of medieval methods for today's readers, Levy proposes Hans-Georg Gadamer as a guide. To Gadamer, readers are participants in a text's meaning, as their own experiences and views shape their reading of the text, while the text simultaneously shapes their experiences and views, fostering new understandings. Levy argues that this cyclical process finds antecedents among medieval interpreters' reading of the text. In keeping with the early church's guide of the rule of faith, today's interpreters read the text

from within parameters. The framework of tradition frees the interpreter to understand the text as part of a *living* tradition. While this conclusion is helpful in providing an introductory contribution of medieval exegesis, it would have been strengthened by devoting more than five pages to the topic. A more expanded treatment of this good conclusion would be welcomed.

Overall, Levy's *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation* is an excellent contribution to the fields of historical and biblical studies. Levy's study is useful to both lay and professional students of history who seek a better understanding of how various medieval interpreters approached reading the Bible. The work can also serve as a reference handbook for the scholar who desires a resource that can provide a quick refresher on a particular interpreter from the medieval era.

