

Reconsidering the  
Relationship between  
Biblical and Systematic  
Theology in the New Testament

Edited by  
BENJAMIN E. REYNOLDS,  
BRIAN LUGIOYO,  
and KEVIN J. VANHOOZER

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

369

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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# Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament

Essays by Theologians and  
New Testament Scholars

edited by

Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo,  
and Kevin J. Vanhoozer

Mohr Siebeck

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In Honor of

Robert H. Gundry

Our Teacher

ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστὸς πρωτεύων



## Foreword

I am privileged to write the Foreword to this volume honoring Bob Gundry. I do so as the present Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College, but, to me at least, more importantly as a close friend of Bob who has been a role model and mentor to me as a biblical scholar from the very beginning of my career.

I met Bob for the first time at the Society of Biblical Literature in New York (1980), being introduced by our common friend and colleague Moisés Silva. Bob had just published his brilliant Matthew commentary, which generated much interest and discussion throughout the biblical guild, and particularly within our evangelical Protestant circles. What struck me right away about Bob's work as a biblical scholar was his meticulous attention to the details of the text. It was his deep love of the Bible as the Word of God that encouraged him to go wherever the text took him. He was unwilling to simply smooth out differences between the Gospels through easy harmonizations; rather he lovingly brought out the distinctive contributions of the particular passage or book that he was studying. As a result of his commitment to the Word of God, he often defends traditional interpretations against naysayers, but, if he is convinced that the Bible leads in a different direction, he has never been afraid to offer interpretations that go against the grain. The academy and the church have greatly benefitted from his expertise over more than the last half century, and we look forward to even more insight from him in future publications.

Bob's tremendous influence extends well beyond his writing and his influence on professional colleagues. In his long and distinguished career at Westmont College (since 1962),<sup>1</sup> he has taught thousands of undergraduate students. Since Westmont is a liberal arts college, most of his students did not go into the ministry or become academics in any theological or biblical discipline. They rather went into business, law, construction, film, retail sales, or any number of jobs and professions. Many married and raised families. As I talk to these Westmont alums, what strikes me is how God used Bob to give them a deep love of God's Word. Without exception, they speak of their former teacher with awe, respect, and love. There is no greater tribute that one can pay to Bob than that he instilled within

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<sup>1</sup> See below "The Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the Work of Robert H. Gundry," 7–16.



his students a deep love of God and his Word and also prepared them to read that Word with integrity.

But there were also other students over the years at Westmont whose hearts and minds were touched by Bob in a special way. These students went on to study at seminaries and then many of them went on to pursue doctorates in biblical or theological studies at the best universities and then to teach the Bible or theology to another generation of students. A number of these students have participated in this volume to honor the one who so inspired them at the very beginning of their careers. As an Old Testament professor, the relationship between Bob and his students makes me think of Prov. 17:6:

Grandchildren are the crown of the elderly,  
and the glory of children is their parents.

Granted I am taking some liberty here with the proverb (though they invite such extensions). The essays that follow by the students (the academic children) of Bob Gundry are a testimony (a crown) to the influence of his teaching and writing over the years. According to the second colon, parents (in this case a professorial parent) is the glory of their children since a godly parent (professor) helps their children by directing them in the right path.

The essays in this volume are stimulating and insightful. They are produced by Bob's academic offspring (one of whom is his actual daughter). They have chosen as the main focus of their study a question posed and addressed by Gundry over the course of his writings, namely the relationship between biblical studies and theological studies. As Gundry recognized, New Testament books have their own specific theological contributions within their particular historical circumstances. Systematic theology has a tendency to synthesize and smooth out different emphases and therefore moves to a more abstract and universal statement of the message of the Bible. Can and, if so, how should these two disciplines relate to each other in the service of the church? The contributors to this present book offer insight into this question.

Bob's own work as well as the fine work of his former students gives us all much to think about as we continue the dialogue between biblical and theological studies. Thank you Bob for all your past and present work as a teacher and a scholar. These essays are a fitting tribute to your fine career.

Tremper Longman, III  
Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies  
Westmont College  
Santa Barbara, California

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## Abbreviations

<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich: <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago, 1999.
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>BZNW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CThM	Calwer theologische Monographien
<i>EJT</i>	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington D. C., 1947–
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i> . American Edition. 55 vols. St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1955–1986.
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NPNF</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1
<i>NPNF</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 2
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PKNT	Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SNTS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina

<i>SSEJC</i>	<i>Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
<i>ThLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

# Introduction

BRIAN LUGIOYO

This volume is dedicated to a scholar and friend, who for over four decades dedicated his life to unwrapping the world of the New Testament to benighted undergraduate students. Robert H. Gundry, Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Greek at Westmont College, patiently guided and deeply shaped the minds of this volume's contributors. As their essays demonstrate, Bob has and continues to challenge the minds of his students to think about the relationship between theology and the New Testament. In 2002, Bob published his extraordinarily titled *Jesus the Word according to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelism, Especially Its Elites in North America*. At the end of this work he wrote the following theological postscript in which he raised a number of questions about how to approach this relationship:

As Christians should we bring to bear the totality of the Bible in our every situation so as to avoid imbalances and extremes? Or should we choose parts of the Bible that seem particularly relevant to a current situation and with a situational change shift to other parts so as to avoid the homogenizing of distinctive messages and a consequent loss of special applicability? . . . Doubtless some will argue for both/and rather than either/or. Others will propose further possibilities. But the basic questions remain: Does the Bible present theological data to be organized neatly, or a range of canonical options to be kept discrete? To what extent should the theological enterprise be systematic? To what extent selective? Ought systematic theology to dominate biblical theology, or vice versa? Or ought they form a partnership of equals, or go their separate ways? What weight should be assigned to theological common ground in the Bible? What weight to theological peculiarities? How important to good theologizing is a perceptive exegesis of the world, or worlds, in which we live as well as a perceptive exegesis of the Bible? And in practice, if not expressly, what answers to these questions has recent evangelical theology given?<sup>1</sup>

As some of Gundry's former students (who went on to pursue scholarship in New Testament studies and theology) we have taken up this challenge and seen these questions as a new homework assignment. Each essay in this volume has attempted to wrestle with one or more of these questions

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Jesus the Word according to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelism, Especially Its Elites in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 95.



concerning the relationship between biblical and systematic theology using a particular topic or text as a vehicle into this discussion.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first introduces the volume's theme and our inspiration to engage it. Benjamin Reynolds's essay "The Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the Work of Robert H. Gundry" offers us a compelling view of Bob's work of integrating New Testament scholarship with rigorous theological reflection. Following this survey of Gundry's own consideration of the relationship, Kevin Vanhoozer introduces the volume's theme with the essay "Is the Theology of the New Testament One or Many?" Here he presents a lucid survey of the history of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology and how recent evangelical scholars have approached the relationship.

The second part of this volume contains five essays from New Testament scholars engaging Gundry's questions through the lenses of the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, the resurrection narratives, Paul, and Revelation. Mark Strauss in "Christology or Christological Purpose in the Synoptic Gospels" looks at the various Christological portraits of Jesus in the Gospels in an attempt to see if there is a unity or a range of views to be kept discrete. Strauss argues that rather than merely positing distinct Christologies or an evolutionary Christological development, the Synoptic Gospels all evince an implied high Christology in their presentations of Jesus as Messiah and as identified with YHWH.

Looking across the history of interpretation of John 6, Benjamin Reynolds thoughtfully examines how one ought to understand Jesus' comments about eating his flesh, in "The 'Eucharistic' Language of John 6 in Biblical and Theological Perspective." Should John 6 and its seemingly sounding eucharistic language be interpreted theologically related to the Eucharist or to its peculiar grammatical and historical context? He argues that given the particular Johannine context, one can see the language of consuming Jesus not necessarily as eucharistic but in line with one of John's major theological themes, belief.

Roy Kotansky in "The Resurrection of Jesus in Biblical Theology" wrestles with the differences between the list of witnesses to the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and the Gospel narratives. He considers whether these various appearances should be harmonized or left discrete. Kotansky argues that the women in the Gospel narratives, and Mary Magdalene in particular, witnessed more of Jesus and the resurrection than the Gospel narratives and Paul state, and thus that discrete historical exegesis and source-critical analysis become the building blocks for systematic theology.

Scholars have generally viewed Paul's text of 1 Cor. 7:32-34 as primarily about anxiety. In her essay "Anxiety or Care for People?" Judith

Gundry argues that the scholarly consensus is predominantly due to a theological vision that attempts to make relevant today a passage that is a world away from us. Paul's argument here is inexorably linked to Paul's view of the imminent end of the world, and thus only when this is taken into account do we gain a more faithful interpretation about marriage and family. In effect she argues that the scholarly disciplines of Scripture must have priority over theology.

The last essay in part two is Webb Mealy's essay "Revelation is One," where he presents two ways of interpreting the millennial reign in Revelation 20. Mealy demonstrates how different theological lenses are employed to harmonize the eschatology of the New Testament. His main interlocutor in this essay is G. K. Beale, who harmonizes New Testament eschatology with a rubric emphasizing an amillennial perspective; however, Mealy believes that the theological lens of a premillennial view better incorporates the New Testament witness in regard to Revelation 20. In this way Mealy shows the importance of how a theological framework can shape the reading of New Testament passages.

The final part of the volume contains five essays from systematic theologians who wrestle with the relationship between the New Testament and their theological task. They approach Gundry's questions through the topics of James's canonicity during the Reformation, the doctrine of election in Ephesians, theological anthropology and neuroscience, docetic tendency in theology, and the theology of interpretation of T. F. Torrance,

Investigating whether the message of the New Testament is a unity or diversity, Jennifer McNutt looks at the role and message of the book of James in her essay "James, 'The "Book of Straw," in Reformational Biblical Exegesis." Here McNutt shows how the radical reformers, Hubmaier and Philips, and the magisterial reformer, Luther, wrestled with the diversity of the New Testament witness, particularly with doctrine of justification, while attempting to hold a high view of Scripture's authority.

Kevin Vanhoozer in "The Origin of Paul's Soteriology: Election, Incarnation, and Union with Christ in Ephesians 1:4" considers Paul's soteriological message in light of the recent contention of the new Evangelical Calvinists that the older interpretations of election are misguided. By especially looking at the doctrine of election in Eph. 1:4, Vanhoozer engages their contentions that Paul here ought not be understood as advocating the traditional Calvinist perspective of limited atonement. After evaluating the scriptural and theological issues, Vanhoozer shows, in a "Gundrian" fashion, that the older is better.

Seeking to wrestle with how good theology requires a perceptive exegesis of the world and the Bible, Brian Lugioyo looks at the relationship between the New Testament, theology, and neuroscience in "Ministering to

Bodies.” He contends that a ministerial context aids the interpreter in understanding the anthropological views of *sōma* in Paul and elsewhere. Lugioyo argues that an enlarged monist anthropology – in line with a non-reductive physicalist perspective – lends itself to a healthier ministry of persons and avoids certain abuses that a radical dualism has allowed.

Roger Newell in his essay “Instead of Sentimental Exegesis” highlights the problem of pre-tribulation rapture eschatology-escapism founded on “timorous feelings” that wish to avoid suffering. Reviewing the patristic witness to Christ, notably the patristic rejection of Docetism, Newell shows the importance of a full-fledged Trinitarian hermeneutic for the reading of Revelation that is pastorally sensitive and eschatologically hopeful.

The last essay of this section is Gary Deddo’s penetrating essay “T. F. Torrance on Theological and Biblical Studies as Co-Servants of the Word of God, Living and Written.” Here Deddo presents a helpful outline of Torrance’s theological method as it relates to reading Scripture and doing theology. He shows Torrance’s conviction that biblical and theological studies are founded on God’s work of revealing himself and reconciling us to himself. As long as exegesis and theology are working toward these ends, they are true to themselves. And so biblical studies and theological studies must form a unity or a partnership.

The volume ends with Stan Gaede’s urging postscript. Encouraged by the essays in this volume and their attempt to cross disciplinary aisles, Gaede charges us to enter and to continue these timely and necessary discussions.

Special thanks is in order to Leslie Moreno for her help in formatting and indexing this volume, and to Webb Mealy for his indexing assistance. We are grateful to Matthias Spitzner for his timely assistance and patient guidance through the formatting and preparation of the volume. We would also like to thank Prof. Jörg Frey and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki for their acceptance of the volume in the Mohr Siebeck WUNT, series 2. But most of all, we wish to thank Bob Gundry, who spurred, inspired, and believed in us, his students.

Part One:  
Introducing the Volume's Theme



# The Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the Work of Robert H. Gundry (with a few anecdotal comments)

BENJAMIN E. REYNOLDS

## Introduction

Robert H. Gundry has spent his entire career at Westmont College: Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies and Greek (1962–66), Associate Professor of Biblical Studies and Greek (1966–70), Professor of New Testament and Greek (1970–1997), Kathleen Smith Chair of Religious Studies (1997–2000), Scholar-in-Residence (2000–), and Professor Emeritus (2001–). Since Westmont is an entirely undergraduate institution, Gundry only taught undergraduate students. And to many of those undergraduates, Gundry was a larger-than-life professor who embodied the academic pursuit, the challenge of learning, and the integration of faith and learning. For many students, Gundry was the first to introduce them to the scholarly study of the Bible.

Gundry's deeply in-toned voice, finely trimmed moustache, frameless glasses, and smartly pressed shirts only added to the aura of knowledge and high academic expectation that exuded from him. For most students, this was intimidating, especially if they never heard his gentle laugh. Among Westmont students, an urban legend has been known to circulate about certain students who either did or considered entering the inner sanctum of Gundry's office with bells attached to their clothing and a rope tied to one leg lest, like an unwary high priest, they should be struck dead upon entering.

The reality was that Gundry was an approachable,<sup>1</sup> conscientious advisor and professor. He demanded much from his students, but he was fair in his evaluation and was concerned with student learning. Gundry took part in student activities and invited smaller classes to his home for dinner or dessert. (His wife Lois was an instrumental part of the latter. On one occa-

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<sup>1</sup> Gundry once played catch on the lawn of Kerrwood Hall, baseball gloves and all, with one of the editors of this volume and another student.

sion, she apologized to a group of students because her homemade apple pie was still warm!) Considering Gundry's efforts of teaching, advising, talks to the incoming first year classes, chapel and baccalaureate messages, participation as a judge or participant in Westmont's annual Spring Sing event,<sup>2</sup> his teaching and preaching in local churches, it is a wonder that he did any academic writing at all. But write and publish, he did.

Gundry's academic writing has been prolific and spans not just the decades but the breadth of New Testament scholarship from his first published article on 1QIsaiah and Mark 14:65 in the second volume of *Revue de Qumran* to his recent book reviews in *Books and Culture* on N. T. Wright's New Testament Translation, Tim Grass's biography of F. F. Bruce, Frederic Raphael's book on Josephus, and most recently Reza Aslan's headline-grabbing book on Jesus as zealot. Gundry is best known within the academic community, and rightly so, for his work on the Synoptic Gospels, particularly his commentaries on Matthew and Mark, his revised doctoral thesis *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, and numerous articles and essays on redactional relationships between the Gospels, including Secret Mark. But that is not to leave out his other books *Sōma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, *The Church and the Tribulation*, *First the Antichrist*, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian*, or his scholarly articles on John's Gospel, Paul's letters, dominical sayings in 1 Peter, Revelation, and again on Qumran. In 2005, Mohr Siebeck published a volume of his published and previously unpublished essays and articles in *The Old is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*. Gundry will likely be known best to students and non-scholars through the two books with which he bridged the gap between scholarship and the Church. The first of these two books is *A Survey of the New Testament*, which is now in its fifth edition and has been translated into Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Korean, Russian, and Turkish. The second book is what Karen Jobes has called his "magnum opus,"<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation*. For a scholar who dedicated his life to undergraduate teaching, his writing has been extensive.<sup>4</sup>

Across this production of scholarship, there are five noticeable themes that particularly reveal something about Robert Gundry as a person and a scholar: 1) his emphasis on reading and knowing the Bible; 2) his clear, solid grammatical-historical exegesis of the biblical text; 3) his commit-

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<sup>2</sup> At one Spring Sing, he even wore a kilt in a cameo skit appearance.

<sup>3</sup> See her comment in the endorsement on the back cover.

<sup>4</sup> For a complete list of Bob Gundry's scholarly publications, see the appendix, 277–81.

ment to the Bible as the Word of God; 4) his concern for the Church; and 5) the evident interplay of biblical and systematic theology within his work. Each of these five themes appears to some extent in all of his work, but only some of the primary examples will be highlighted below.

## Emphasis on the Biblical Text and Exegesis

While some may not consider a textbook a significant scholarly contribution, the reality is that Gundry's *A Survey of the New Testament* first published in 1970 provides insight into the importance he places on reading and knowing the text of the NT. This emphasis is striking when Gundry's NT introductory text is compared with more recent introductions that have flooded the market in the decades since his first edition. Unlike many recent textbooks, *Survey* centers on the reading of the NT, which in this day and age of biblical illiteracy is valuable for students and teachers alike. Gundry asks students to read the text of the NT, and after they have done so, he then supplements the biblical text with explanatory information from historical, cultural, sociological, ideological, and archaeological contexts. The focus of *Survey* is on students learning what the biblical text says and what it means.

Further evidence of his concern for the text of the Bible is his *Commentary on the New Testament* with the *entire* NT in "literal translation"! Gundry states in the introduction: "the very awkwardness of a literal translation often highlights features of the scriptural text obscured, eclipsed or even contradicted by loose translations and paraphrases."<sup>5</sup> Because of this awkwardness, Gundry places explanatory words within brackets in the translation so that the translation is clearer in passages where it may not be. These words often highlight Greek grammatical aspects that do not have English equivalents or clarify antecedents to pronouns. Either way Gundry emphasizes knowing the biblical text.

Gundry's emphasis on the biblical text is combined with his traditional interpretations of biblical studies issues. (He did give the volume of his collected essays the subtitle "*New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations*.") This traditional "old is better" position is evident as far back as his revised doctoral thesis published in 1967. Regarding Matthew's explanation of why Jesus is called a Nazarene (2:23), Gundry states, after an extensive discussion of options, "We therefore fall back on *the old view*. . ."<sup>6</sup> More recent evidence of his traditional interpretations

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<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament*, ix. N.B. his critique of N.T. Wright's NT translation: "Tom's Targum," *Books and Culture* 18/3 (May/June 2012): 22–24.

<sup>6</sup> *Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew*, 103 (emphasis mine).



include his critiques of Helmut Koester and Dominic Crossan's arguments for Secret Mark, Otto Betz's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, N.T. Wright's reconstructed Jesus, and the New Perspective on Paul ("hurrah for the Old Perspective on Paul"!<sup>7</sup>). What should be made clear is that Gundry does not hold to these traditional views for the sake of being "traditional." His positions and arguments are subservient to the text of the Old and New Testaments. The old is better only because the other, "newer" positions do not stand up to rigorous, exegetical scrutiny, which is a second notable feature of Gundry's scholarship.

### Grammatical-Historical Exegetical Detail

Gundry's solid grammatical-historical exegesis is something for which he is well-known. Donald Hagner refers to "vintage Gundry" as "sure-footed redactional analysis, tough-minded reasoning, provocative freshness, and compelling exegesis."<sup>8</sup> Gundry's exegetical work is not merely reading and knowing the text of the New Testament. Rather it is an in-depth investigation of the biblical text in its original language in which he focuses on the historical occasion of the New Testament, grammatical details of the original Greek, redactional relationships between the Gospels, and even New Testament theology in its connections with the Old Testament. Gundry's exegetical focus is clearly evident in his revised doctoral work *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* where he examines and explains the OT text-forms found in Matthew's Gospel. His examinations detail the similarities and differences of wording between the Masoretic Text, the various LXX texts, Matthew, and/or Luke and Mark. Considering that these comparisons were made prior to the age of desktop computer aids, his care and precision is astounding.

The same detail can be found in *Sōma in Biblical Theology* in which Gundry examines the use of σῶμα ("body") in Greek thought, Judaism, the OT, and the NT, with particular focus on Paul, arguing that σῶμα has a primarily physical meaning. In *The Church and the Tribulation*, he argues for a posttribulation rapture because "positive indications of a posttribulation rapture arise out of a proper exegesis of relevant Scripture passages and derive support from the history of the doctrine."<sup>9</sup> The first half of *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* offers an excellent argument for the continuation of the John's Word Christology throughout the rest of

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<sup>7</sup> "The Inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul," *The Old is Better*, 224.

<sup>8</sup> Endorsement on the paperback cover of *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>9</sup> *Church and Tribulation*, 10 (emphasis mine).

the Gospel and not merely in John 1:1–18. In each of these monographs, Gundry presents thorough, detailed grammatical-historical exegesis that leads to his conclusions,<sup>10</sup> and the exegetical arguments that he mounts often make it extremely difficult to argue against his positions.

Gundry's exegetical work and sensitivity to the text appear to be the only things that would lead him away from a "traditional" view. For instance, Gundry has recently argued against the imputation of Christ's righteousness because of the exegetical evidence in the NT concerning "righteousness" and the one who reckons people as righteous.<sup>11</sup> Gundry's infamous "non-traditional" view that Matthew embellished or created events (e.g. the Magi and Peter's walking on water) arose out of his use of meticulous redaction criticism in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>12</sup> These views are entirely based upon his close reading of the text of Matthew compared with Mark, Q, and/or Luke. Because of his thorough examination, Gundry is convinced that the differences in Matthew are due to Matthew's "theological art."<sup>13</sup> Matthew did not think he was writing a modern history and therefore was free to embellish and create in order to portray the theological reality of who Jesus was and is. For Gundry, Matthew's free adaptation of Mark and Q parallels Matthew's use of the OT that Gundry had painstakingly noted in his doctoral research.<sup>14</sup> Yet, Gundry's views come not from a pre-determined understanding. In actuality, Gundry states that in writing his commentary on Matthew he set out to disprove Markan priority and the existence of Q.<sup>15</sup> What leads Gundry to take these "non-traditional" positions is his emphasis on the biblical text, his detailed exegesis, and his avoidance of what he views as easy harmonization.<sup>16</sup> For Gundry, being true to the biblical text means doing so even if the answers become difficult to a traditional view. Consistent, close scrutiny of the biblical text is Gundry's *modus operandi* and the primary determinate of his views.

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<sup>10</sup> See also "Essential Physicality," *The Old is Better*, esp. 191: "The biblical and extrabiblical evidence belies the confidently repeated statements, larded with supportive quotations from supposedly authoritative scholars and often substituting for careful attention to the biblical and extrabiblical texts themselves. . . ."

<sup>11</sup> "Non-imputation of Christ's Righteousness," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Debate*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17–45.

<sup>12</sup> *Matthew*, xxiv.

<sup>13</sup> N.B. the change of subtitle of the Matthew commentary from the first edition to the second: "A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art" to "A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution."

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Matthew*, xxiv.

<sup>15</sup> "A Response to 'Matthew as Midrash,'" 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Matthew*, 626, 627; also, "A Response to 'Methodological Unorthodoxy,'" 96; "Hermeneutic Liberty," 16. See most recently his concluding comments in his review of Reza Alsani's *Zealot, Books & Culture* (November/December 2013): 14–16.

## The Bible as God's Word

The reason for Gundry's emphasis on the biblical text and his close exegesis of it is his unabashed understanding of the Bible as God's Word. I remember sitting in first year Greek when in the course of a discussion about translation Gundry referred to red letter Bibles as an "abomination." What was his reason for this view? The entire Bible is the Word of God and not merely the words of Jesus.

Gundry's understanding of the Bible as God's Word appears in a number of his works, if only subtly. He concludes the introduction to *Survey* by giving four reasons for studying the New Testament. The third reason is "theological": "the New Testament consists of divinely inspired accounts and interpretations of Jesus' redemptive mission in the world and forms the standard of belief and practice for the Christian church."<sup>17</sup> Some of his clearest and strongest statements on the Bible as the Word of God come in the "Theological Postscript" to his Matthew commentary. Gundry wrestles seriously with Matthew's changes to Mark and Q because he understands the final form of Matthew's text as God's Word.<sup>18</sup> He believes that Matthew was inspired by the Holy Spirit in these redactional changes such that the "Spirit of Christ directed the editing, so that its results, along with the historical data, constitute God's Word."<sup>19</sup> And again, "The equation of the Bible with God's Word must stay, the straining to resolve all historical difficulties in the Bible must go."<sup>20</sup>

Because of his view of the Bible as the Word of God, Gundry believes authorial intent is important. In his "Theological Postscript" to the Matthew commentary, he states:

What the biblical authors intended to say should exercise a magisterial role over our interpretation of the Christian faith. . . . Therefore, though disagreements over the originally intended meaning of the biblical text merit exegetical discussion, rejection of that meaning calls for theological warfare. Otherwise, we stand in danger of losing the faith altogether.<sup>21</sup>

And more recently, in the introduction to his *Commentary on the New Testament*, Gundry states, with regard to his interpretations of the NT, "Preachers, Bible Study leaders, and others should make whatever adjustments they deem necessary for contemporary audiences, but not adjust-

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<sup>17</sup> *Survey*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Matthew*, 624.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 640; see also 625, 635.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 627. He notes on p. 2 that his "theological commitment to the canonical text . . . as divine revelation" is part of his reason for emphasizing "the meaning of Matthew's text."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 638.

ments that obscure or change the text's intended meaning."<sup>22</sup> For Gundry, it is important to know and study the intended authorial meaning of the Bible because it is God's Word.

## Concern for the Church

Another theme that resonates throughout Gundry's academic writing is his concern for the Church. This concern is explicit in *The Church and the Tribulation* where he indicates that the purpose of his writing is inform and prepare the Church for tribulation persecution that he believes is inevitably part of the Church's future. Gundry argues that this view calls for a "mental and moral preparation."<sup>23</sup> His more popular book on the same topic *First the Antichrist* is more explicitly directed to Christian believers. While he was writing this book, he mentioned to one of his NT introduction classes of his concern for believers as the 21<sup>st</sup> century approached. (Remember the fears and concerns over "Y2K?") Another example of Gundry's concern for the Church is the fourth and final reason he gives for studying the New Testament in *Survey*. It is the "devotional reason": "the Holy Spirit uses the New Testament to bring people into a living and growing personal relation with God through his Son Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup>

The clearest example of his concern for the Church is noticeable in his *Commentary on the New Testament*, which is particularly aimed at pastors and lay people. In the introduction, he states that in writing the interpretations in the commentary he "concentrated . . . on what is likely to prove useful for expository preaching, teaching, group discussion, and private education."<sup>25</sup> Gundry's magnum opus is not a massive New Testament Theology bringing together the fruits of decades of labor or a deeply exegetical work on an academic New Testament topic. Instead, it is a NT commentary written in accessible language that is particularly aimed at pastors and lay people for the purpose of assisting the average believer to understand more fully God's Word in the New Testament.

It appears fairly obvious from his writing that Gundry desires all believers to take the Bible seriously as the Word of God, to listen to what the Bible says, and to study closely what it says so that the Church's theology and personal devotion to Jesus may grow and deepen in both knowledge and practice.

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<sup>22</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> *Church and the Tribulation*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Survey*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Commentary on the New Testament*, ix.

## Relationship of Biblical and Systematic Theology

Finally, Gundry's work often proceeds from exegetical study to the challenge of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology. Many biblical scholars do not make the effort to connect these two, not least because of the difficulty of doing so but also because of the way the Biblical Studies guild views the theological enterprise.<sup>26</sup> Gundry's "Theological Postscript" at the conclusion of his Matthew commentary, with its "guide to systematians," highlights his attempts to bring together exegesis and biblical theology with implications for belief, namely a warning about canonizing theological systems.<sup>27</sup> This emphasis is also evident in *Sōma in Biblical Theology*. In this scholarly monograph, after Gundry argues that σῶμα refers to physical body, he spends the final third of the monograph addressing what this definition implies for theology, particularly for "death and resurrection, the being of man, the nature and source of sin and salvation, individuality and corporateness, and the ecclesial Body of Christ."<sup>28</sup> And again, in *Jesus the Word*, Gundry moves from close grammatical-historical exegesis of John's Gospel to the Gospel's import for the Church and the way in which the Church should or should not engage culture.<sup>29</sup>

For Gundry, theology derives from the biblical, canonical text. In "Hermeneutic Liberty, Theological Liberty, and Historical Occasionalism," the lead essay in *The Old is Better*, Gundry sets out more explicitly his view of how the relationship between biblical and systematic theology should work.<sup>30</sup> For Gundry, not surprisingly, the biblical text in its original intended meaning has the first word. Therefore, Gundry calls for allowing the diversity of the New Testament to be heard, and he argues against the traditionalist urge to defend unity of the biblical text over its diversity. Gundry contends that such a unity may be a "theological benefit" but it is a "praxeological loss."<sup>31</sup>

Gundry argues that the collection of books within the canon, written at different times for and under various circumstances, highlights the diversity that is found within it. He contends that biblical hermeneutics will find

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<sup>26</sup> Note Gundry's comments ("Surrejoinder," 113) to Norman Geisler about his inclusion of a "Theological Postscript" in his Matthew commentary: "I must have been a fool to have written much of what I have written, including the Theological Postscript, in my *Commentary*, in order to gain academic respectability outside evangelical ranks."

<sup>27</sup> *Matthew*, 640.

<sup>28</sup> *Sōma*, 159, 159–244.

<sup>29</sup> See also "Is John's Gospel Sectarian?" *The Old is Better*, 315–23.

<sup>30</sup> However, this essay has obvious roots in his Theological Postscript and various responses to his detractors over the Matthew commentary.

<sup>31</sup> "Hermeneutic Liberty," 16; see also his comments at the end of the "Theological Postscript," *Matthew*, 640.

diversity and that it is the role of systematic theology to address the unity of the Bible without losing the sense of diversity that exists in the presentation of the Bible to us. Gundry suggests that systematics may actually need to focus on boundaries of belief deriving from the canon rather than on finding a unifying center.<sup>32</sup> Gundry concludes his essay by positing that there is space for development and hermeneutic liberty particularly where the canon “does not imply exhaustiveness in the sorts of circumstances in and for which the books of the Bible were written.”<sup>33</sup> Yet he also maintains that theological development must be tempered by testing to see if it contradicts the canon and that it reflects what is in the canon.<sup>34</sup> Gundry understands that the text of the Bible is what guides and is the rule for belief and practice. Scripture, even if diverse in its canonical presentation, is the bar by which any theology or belief is measured.

### Final Comments

Robert Gundry has written much that gives evangelicals pause, but he has also written much that they can rally around.<sup>35</sup> While his scholarly writing may appear inconsistent to some, Gundry is profoundly consistent in his view of the importance of knowing and reading Scripture, his careful grammatical-historical exegesis of the biblical text, his unashamed view of the Bible as the Word of God, his care and concern for the personal spiritual growth of the believers, and his understanding that theology must stem from the Bible, God’s Word. As former students, looking back on his teaching, these are all aspects that were clearly evident in his lectures, assignments, and occasional chapel messages. Gundry has always been a conscientious scholar who has paid exacting attention to the biblical text out of reverence for it as the Word of God and as a text that is vital for the theological and devotional sustaining and growth of God’s people.

In closing, I offer one final anecdote. In December of 1996, an art exhibit which won best in show at the annual Westmont College Christmas art show featured a Bible that had been cut, ten pages at a time, into strips that remained connected to the spine of the Bible. The theme of the show was “Une Ange Passe” (“An Angel is passing by”), and Linda Ekstrom had

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<sup>32</sup> Gundry’s position on a unifying center seems to have changed over the years, since one of the editors who took a course on New Testament Theology with Gundry was required in the final assignment to read the NT and state its unifying theme (see the next essay).

<sup>33</sup> “Hermeneutic Liberty,” 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See his *Books and Culture* review “Smithereens!” and the ensuing blog debates.