

THE MORNING STAR

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God is in the details: further thoughts on theological interpretation of Scripture

BY JOSEPH MANGINA

In a recent editorial (September 17), my colleague Peter Robinson set forth a basic explanation of the theological interpretation of Scripture, often referred to as TIS. In that article, he made some crucial points. The theological interpreter approaches the text not from a neutral perspective, but from a standpoint of engagement, honouring Scripture as God's living Word. She reads the Bible as a coherent story centred on Jesus Christ, a unitary testimony to him—even if the unity is often difficult to discern!—to be read in the company of Christians throughout the ages. To all of this, I can only say “yes, amen.” The following remarks supplement Professor Robinson's extremely helpful account of the mode, not method, that is TIS.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

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The Story of Radio Mind: A Missionary's Journey on Indigenous Land, p. 4

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Women's Breakfast, p. 4

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Lester Randall Toronto Festival of Preaching, p. 4

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What's theological about it?

One question that can legitimately be raised about TIS is “what’s theological about it?” At the most basic level, it means reading the text with God in view, and that in multiple senses. God is in view in the sense that God—not just any deity, but the triune God of Israel—is the Bible’s subject matter, the One all its words and sentences and stories are finally “about.” The non-theological reader simply doesn’t approach the text with that conviction. He or she may approach it as a record of social or political history of the ancient Near East or Roman Empire, or as a source of knowledge of ancient literary conventions, or as historical evidence for understanding the cults of Baal, Astarte, or Diana. These are all perfectly legitimate enterprises, from which the Christian reader potentially has a lot to learn. But a genuinely *theological* reading of Scripture is one that arises as an act of obedience to God, and that seeks an encounter with Him that is available in these writings in a singular way. That is why we call it *Holy Scripture*.

Read in the LORD’s own presence

This leads us to a second point: we not

“*We not only read Scripture as being “about” the LORD, but in the LORD’s own presence.*”

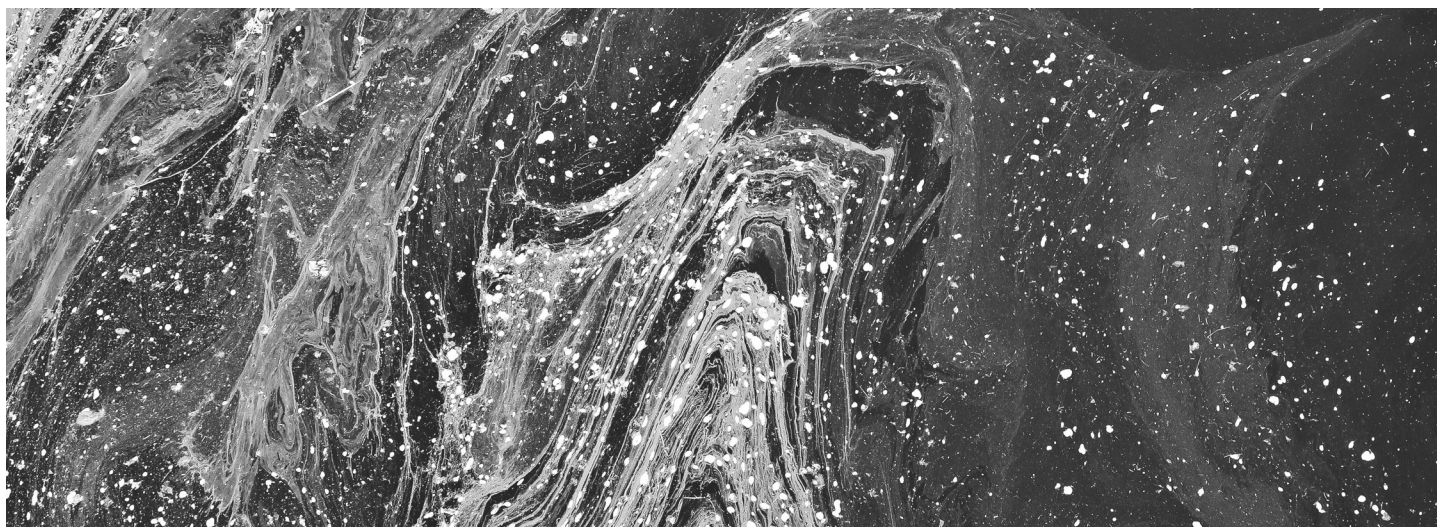
only read Scripture as being “about” the LORD, but in the LORD’s own presence. Stated differently, Scripture is God’s personal address, whether to the church or to the individual believer. This need not mean, indeed most of the time it probably *won’t* mean, that when we read the Bible we will have special “experiences” of God. No doubt our reading of Scripture should be deeply felt, should move us, but that is not the point. The point is that reading the Bible is never less than a triadic event, involving the reader, the text, and the LORD, the One in whose company our journey with Scripture takes place. “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground,” the LORD says to Moses (Exodus 3:5). This is among other things a hermeneutical counsel, a word for

readers and interpreters of Holy Writ.

More than a repository of objective truths

A third point: to approach the Bible in the TIS “mode” means that we are not first of all reading for doctrines, ideas, or principles. This is a hard one for me as a theologian. Theologians—academics more generally—traffic in ideas. And, of course, Christian doctrine really does matter! But when we treat the Bible as mainly a repository of objective truths that we can “mine” from it, the text itself ironically becomes redundant. Once we’ve extracted the doctrinal or propositional or moral essence of it—the kernel from the husk, to use a famous image from the nineteenth century—the text can safely be set aside. That can’t be right. For the great tradition of Christian reading of Scripture tells us that it is in the *words themselves* that God is to be found, in the narrative, genealogy, poetry, commandment, gospel, and apocalyptic vision that make up the warp and woof of Scripture. *Dieu est dans les détails*; God is in the details, said the great modernist architect Mies van der Rohe. This is another sound piece of advice for the theological reader of Scripture.

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In friendship with the historic church

But having said that, we can also acknowledge that the creeds and historic Christian teaching are our friends. As Professor Robinson reminded us, theological reading of Scripture is the church's reading; and how can the church read other than in the company of the saints, and with the guidance of the creeds that serve as authoritative witnesses to the apostolic faith? To give an example: the Nicene Creed's words *homoousios to patri*, "of one being/substance with the Father," surely do not appear anywhere in the Bible. Yet they state one of the church's fundamental convictions about the triune being of God and the identity of Jesus Christ. This being so, how can I

read Scripture other than in light of the church's settled doctrine on this matter? It was under the "pressure" of Scripture that the church (guided, as we must suppose, by the Spirit) formulated the Creed in the first place, and the Creed serves as a guide for the proper interpretation of the text. This is a healthy circularity. Far from demoting the Bible to second rank, ecclesial and creedal reading sets it in a place of highest honour.

The Bible: far more important than our ideas about it

There is doubtless much more that can and needs to be said about TIS. What is most crucial to recognize, though, is that the Bible is far more important than our ideas and theories about the Bible. This includes TIS! If this particular

interpretive approach bears fruit in the life of the church, these fruits will be apparent; if it does not, we can look for other and better ways of discerning the LORD's Word. For now, Wycliffe College is happy to be a laboratory where the research program that is TIS can be explored and extended in a Christianly faithful way.

ABOUT

Joseph Mangina is Professor of Systematic Theology at Wycliffe College.



Judy invites you...

Grace Church on-the-Hill, located a five minute walk from St. Clair West subway station, has invited the internationally renowned preacher, writer, and church leader, **Rev. Dr. William Willimon**, to address the topic "**The Calling of Christians Today: Christian Vocation in an Anxious Age**". On **Saturday, November 16**, Dr. Willimon will speak on these two topics:

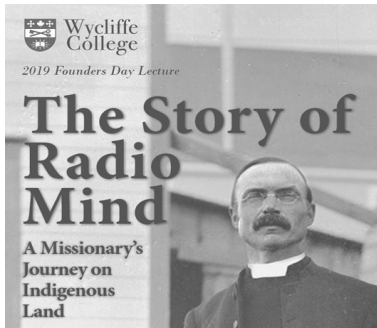
1. How can Christians live out our calling in the present age that is full of skepticism and anxiety?
2. How can clergy/the church help and guide Christians to find their baptismal vocation?

If you've never had a chance to hear Will Willimon speak I strongly encourage you to attend this event. The student rate, which includes lunch, will be worth every penny!

Tickets (regular: \$50, students: \$25) are available online at gracechurchonthehill.ca, or contact miling@gracechurchonthehill.ca or 416-488-7884.

Judy Paulsen, Professor of Evangelism

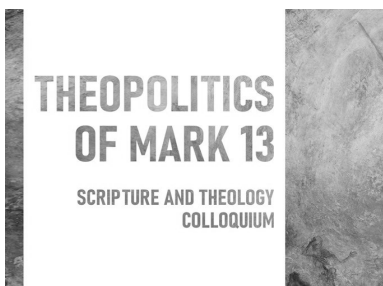
Events & Announcements



FOUNDERS DAY LECTURE: THE STORY OF RADIO MIND—A MISSIONARY'S JOURNEY ON INDIGENOUS LAND

Wednesday, Oct 16, 3:00—4:30 p.m. in Reading Room, Wycliffe College

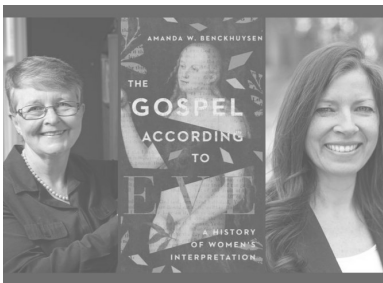
This year the Founders' Day Memorial lecture will feature Professor Pamela Klassen (Religious Studies, UofT), who will speak about her new book, *The Story of Radio Mind: A Missionary's Journey on Indigenous Land*, which tells the story of Frederick Herbert DuVernet, 1860-1924, a Wycliffe graduate (Class of 1880). It is a free, public event. Anyone is welcome to attend.



2019 LESTER RANDALL TORONTO FESTIVAL OF PREACHING

Friday, Oct 18, 9:00 a.m. — 4:00 p.m., Wycliffe College

Presented to you by the Wycliffe Centre for Scripture and Theology, this event will explore the Theopolitics of Mark 13. Our speakers will be: Craig Hovey (Ashland), Rebekah Eklund (Loyolla), Ephraim Radner (Wycliffe), Matthew Burdette (Dallas), Respondent: Stephen Chester (Wycliffe). For more information and registration, visit wycliffecollege.ca/scriptureandtheology



WOMEN'S BREAKFAST WITH MARION TAYLOR & AMANDA BENCHKUYSEN

Saturday, Oct 26, 9:30 a.m. — 12:00 p.m. in Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College

This year the event will feature Prof. Marion Taylor and Prof. Amanda Benckhuysen from Calvin Theological Seminary. This year's theme is "The Gospel According to Eve," which will include a launch of Prof. Benckhuysen's new book "The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation." In addition, you will meet women currently studying at Wycliffe and hear more about their personal stories of calling as well as their journeys of spiritual formation. Tickets are \$10.00 and the deadline to purchase is October 14. Visit wycliffecollege.ca/womensbreakfast2019, call (416) 946-3549, or email events@wycliffe.utoronto.ca for more details and purchase information.



2019 LESTER RANDALL TORONTO FESTIVAL OF PREACHING

Sunday-Tuesday, Oct 27- 29, Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Toronto

This is an annual preaching event, which consists of a mix of workshops, lectures, private and public preaching events, networking and fellowship, led by keynote speakers and other well-known clergy and professors of preaching from across North America. **Professor Annette Brownlee** from Wycliffe College will also be giving a workshop at the event: "Playing Around Scripture." To register, visit lesterrandall.com.



Wycliffe Padfolio: available for purchase at Front Desk for \$20!