

BOOK REVIEW

Frances M. Young, *Scripture, the Genesis of Doctrine*. Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity I. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 2023. Hbk.pp.xxvii+280. \$40.99. ISBN 9780802882981
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Frances Young is one of today's most eminent and prolific writers on the relationship between the New Testament and early Christian intellectual culture. Among her best-known books are *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (1990), *The Making of the Creeds* (1991), *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (1997), *Brokenness and Blessing: Towards a Biblical Spirituality* (2007), *Exegesis and Theology in Early Christianity* (2012) and *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (2013). These and other works in many ways prepare for *Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity*, which may turn out to be her crowning *magnum opus*. The first of its two volumes is here under review: *Scripture, the Genesis of Doctrine* (2023) traces the symbiosis and mutual influence between canonical Scripture and the doctrinal affirmation of the Christian faith in the early centuries. Volume 2, *Scripture in Doctrinal Controversy*, will focus more specifically on early Christian debates surrounding Christology and the Doctrine of God.

Twentieth-century historical criticism enforced a basic disjuncture separating the New Testament writings from the supposedly much later, gradual development of ideas about God, Christ and the Trinity that came to define the Christian faith. What the New Testament says about Christ may have bubbled up, inchoate and disparate, in the first century, but what Christianity in fact believes about him belongs to the philosophical mythmaking of the fourth. Never the twain shall meet, in respectable scholarship: so it was long believed, including (as she herself reflects) by a youthful Frances Young, and thus, in certain musty corners of the Society of Biblical Literature's convention centres, it remains to this day. But this is an idea whose time has gone. Instead, Frances Young here deploys her abundant treasures of textual and theological learning on a historically far more plausible project, exploring the relationship between Scripture, doctrine and instruction within the intellectual context of the early Christian centuries. She demonstrates that in fact the emerging scriptural canon and the Rule of Faith developed both side by side and as well as reciprocally, each influencing the other and both revered for their apostolic status and pedigree. Some previous attempts to explain the 'scripture vs. doctrine'

dichotomy either in terms of organic development (John Henry Newman; cf. latterly John Behr) or, conversely, in terms of a Hellenizing and Catholicizing alienation (Harnack and twentieth-century biblical scholarship) claimed an implausible neutrality. What we need instead, Young suggests, is an interpreted account that takes seriously the necessary historical tension between ‘acculturation’ and resistance to culture in the light of doctrinal convictions deeply grounded in Scripture.

She embarks in Chapter 2 on a consideration of the teaching-oriented, ‘school-like’ rather than religion-like, world of early Christian settings like Rome and Alexandria, especially in their foregrounding of scriptural interpretation and reflection on the nature of the One God. Marcion then serves as a case in point for the way Homeric and Jewish exegetical study and learning, not least in question-and-answer mode, shaped second-century Christian engagement with Scripture. In critical dialogue with the views of Marcion and Ptolemy, Justin and others came to affirm that the Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ, the Son of the God of Israel and the world’s Creator. Chapter 4 juxtaposes the Valentinian *Gospel of Truth*’s loosely scriptural cosmology of an interior saving knowledge with Irenaeus’s account of the Rule or Canon of Faith in his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Young locates here the second-century conviction of a mutual liturgical ‘coinherence’ between Scripture and the three-articled apostolic Rule of Faith, which she also sees attested in the emergence of creedally relevant *nomina sacra* in the manuscript tradition. That coinherence undergirds the rule’s function as Scripture’s *hypothesis* or summary, ‘rooted’ in the apostolic tradition and ‘honed’ through its confrontation with gnostic views. For Origen, doctrine operates in a Spirit-led *paideia* of continually deepening insight into God’s often hidden or indirectly revealed Word, moving from literal to spiritual. And yet conversely, as already for Irenaeus, doctrine for him also determines right and wrong reading; without it, Scripture cannot be understood.

By the fourth century, Creeds had begun to replace more informal instantiations of the Rule of Faith, serving as a summary of Scripture in the entire substance of Christian faith, each reinforcing the other (Chapter 6). Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Homilies* illustrate this trend, embedded in the school-like setting of churches teaching Christian doctrine in keeping with the Creed. Doctrine now offered the ancient Christian writers not only the ‘hypothesis’ of Scripture’s key narrative portraiture (Irenaeus) but its fundamental meaning, here explored through the sequence of the Creed’s central theologoumena. It was this dynamic that eventually sustained the hermeneutically articulated backlash against the untethered allegorizing of those who think ‘spiritual interpretation’ means ‘Adam is not Adam, paradise is not paradise’ (p. 225, quoting Theodore of Mopsuestia). The core outline of Christian doctrine was present in Scripture, but doctrine in turn provided the necessary key to scriptural interpretation.

Augustine *On Christian Doctrine* helps round out this volume 1, interpreting Scripture within a doctrinal framework sensitive to the encoding of scriptural ‘things’ (i.e. realities) and ‘signs’ in an adequate human language. In place of a modernist biblical criticism that fragmented and bifurcated Scripture from doctrine, we require a more adequate understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of

doctrinal and exegetical development. Scripture and doctrine do coinhere, it turns out – and permit the reconciliation of historical-critical with theological questions.

If pressed to pick nits, a biblical scholar like the reviewer might choose to find them in a somewhat dated, twentieth-century view of Paul as a rejecter of Torah, which arguably tints and distorts the analysis in relation not just to Marcion but also to a particular reading of Ignatius (and which, e.g., knows Paula Fredriksen only as a scholar of Augustine). Or one might probe why the story of unhappy dead ends in the Doctrine-and-Scripture debate should begin with Marcion and the Valentinians rather than with Scripture's own contention over the discernment of false prophets and false teachers – like those who ignore the apostolic counsel not to go 'beyond what is written' (1 Cor 4.6), who foreground 'myths' and 'human commandments' (e.g. 1 Tim 1.4, 4.7; 2 Tim 4.4; Tit 1.14) or who hold that 'Jesus Christ has not come in the flesh' (1 John 4.2; 2 John 7).

It's a long way, they say, to Tipperary. It's also a long, long way from an essay in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977) to the affirmation of *Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity* that, historically and especially in worship, 'Scripture and Doctrine truly coinhere'. At the outset of Frances Young's remarkable, in so many ways exemplary postmodern intellectual pilgrimage lay the idea of Incarnation as myth, pertinent to the hearer's attitude but not to literal truth, contributing to a book that even its liberal critics found 'inflammatory' and 'largely speculative' (David Edwards, *Church Times*, 1 July 1977). This long way to the present destination is something on which the author herself reflects repeatedly, a pilgrimage that the back cover memorably blurbs as leading 'from disputation to devotion'.

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