

The best of these pieces manage to do exactly what an *Oxford Handbook* claims to do and precisely what you might hope from a high-quality conference paper: providing a higher-level introduction to key themes while also sharing original research work. In the first section, Andrea Longhi's contribution on the decommissioning and reuse of sacred space provides a dense but consistently stimulating analysis: 'A church', she argues, 'is not merely a shell, but a clock of concurrent worship cycles' (p. 89). In the final section, Brett Henderson provides a fascinating account of a miracle-working shrine in New Mexico. At the heart of the Santuario de Chimayó is the *pocito*, or little well, that produces holy dirt which believers believe has healing properties. Again, the author shows that this is a sort of spatial palimpsest in which successive layers of history can be found.

Within the substantial section of regional studies there are also some quite strikingly interesting pieces. Wei-Cheng Lin is insightful on the religious spaces of pre-modern China. Marilyn J. Chiat provides an exemplary survey of material on the form and function of the ancient Synagogue. David Simonowitz uses a case study of a Jordanian State Mosque to raise bigger questions about Islamic sacred spaces. Daniel Dei is especially interesting on West African religion, creating a typology of spaces: landscapes, 'time-dependent', and 'socially sacralised', as well as more familiar buildings. There is a fascinating study of Spiritual Baptists in the West Indies by Brendan Jamal Thornton and another, equally intriguing, account of a Sufi shrine in Pennsylvania by Merin Shobhana Xavier.

Less successful are those chapters – and there are several – that focus narrowly on the author's own work without providing much context or sense of its place within the field as a whole. It is also a shame that a book on space should have so few images – and those so poorly presented. The lack of attention paid to Anglican and Episcopalian themes is worth noting, too. The index makes one reference to 'Episcopalians, Anglo-Catholic', and that is to a single sentence; but otherwise the main subject of this journal is subsumed within the broader category of Protestantism. I suspect that readers of this journal might disagree.

It would be wrong, however, to finish on a negative note. Even the less immediately appealing chapters are often worth reading and the whole enterprise can only elicit admiration. Were this indeed a regular conference, I would certainly attend again next year.

William Whyte
St John's College, Oxford, UK

Mark D. Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), pp. 208. ISBN 978-1433573958
doi:[10.1017/S1740355322000420](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355322000420)

As a biblical scholar I am intrigued by how theologies of scripture make their argument, how they construct their theology (or doctrine) of scripture. The Bible, or more accurately, our Bibles, consist of remarkably detailed and diverse texts.



Any and every theology of a Bible, of a particular 'scripture', constrains the detail and the diversity, attempting to forge from it a coherent theological account.

Mark D. Thompson's *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* does just this, offering a fairly clear and coherently argued theology of the Protestant Bible. While Thompson claims that his starting point is Jesus (p. 23), specifically what Jesus 'actually said' (p. 24), and 'the pattern of Jesus's ministry' (p. 24), he acknowledges that such a starting point returns one to 'the text of the Bible itself' (p. 24), and therefore to 'the nature of the Bible as we have it' (p. 26). This is my focus in the review: the nature of the Bible as we have it.

Thompson is attentive to what he refers to as 'various distinctive tones and emphases' within the New Testament (p. 27), for example, but he tends to stress a 'unity of focus and purpose across the entire New Testament' (p. 27) and a 'deep continuity' between the Old Testament and the New Testament (p. 26). Thompson uses notions like 'our place in God's timetable' (p. 29) to provide coherence across the canonical range from Genesis to Revelation (in the Protestant canon).

Thompson's theology of scripture is strongly Christocentric (p. 30) but assumes an evangelical (in the Reformed mode) understanding of the person and work of Jesus (pp. 30, 32, 33-59). Of particular interest to me is Thompson's understanding of 'Jesus's attitude toward the Scriptures' (p. 36). Thompson tends to use Jesus' references to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) as evidence of Jesus treating 'the Old Testament as the word of God that should direct the life of his people' (p. 41), with an emphasis on the first part of this ambiguous sentence. He goes on to give the example of Jesus confronting the Pharisees in Mark 7 concerning their concept of *Corban* (p. 41). What Thompson takes from this encounter is that Jesus cites the fifth commandment, citing 'words from the Old Testament' (p. 41). However, Jesus is doing more than simply citing the Old Testament, Jesus is contending with the Pharisees' interpretation and understanding of Old Testament purity laws (Mk 7.3-4). This is an excellent example, among many (see, for example, a few chapters later, Mk 12.24), in which Jesus (in Mark) contends for the inclusive and compassionate theological trajectory within the Old Testament, over against the exclusive and condemnatory theological trajectory within the Old Testament advocated here by the Pharisees. I invoke here, of course, the notion of divergent yet dialogical trajectories put forward in the biblical theology of Walter Brueggemann. Is Jesus contending merely with scriptural interpretation or with intrinsic divergent scriptural trajectories? My point here is that we might make different arguments about how Jesus uses scripture (the Old Testament) and how Jesus understands the Old Testament scripture.

How Thompson understands 'the nature of the Bible as we have it' (p. 26) demonstrates a tension between an astute understanding of scripture as 'self-evidently a creaturely artifact' (p. 97), that 'Scripture is a historical artifact' (p. 98), and his need to assert that each and every detail of the Bible is wholly true with respect to 'scientific or historical truth' (p. 153). The latter is puzzling given Thompson's reluctance to begin his account of a theology of scripture with reference to 'its description of historical events' (p. 23) and his recognition that the canon 'is a theological reality before it is a historical one' (p. 110). Why not affirm that scripture's

'truth' is primarily theological rather than historical or scientific? That scripture is about 'what happens' rather than 'what happened'? Instead, Thompson uses Jesus to argue that 'Jesus consistently treated the Scriptures as utterly true' (p. 49), insisting that 'Jesus accepted the Old Testament's historical references as reliable and true' (p. 49). Later, in a chapter on 'The Character of Scripture', Thompson elaborates, citing Paul Feinberg approvingly (p. 152), arguing that each and every detail of the Bible is wholly true with respect even to 'scientific or historical truth' (p. 153). Instead of building his theology of scripture on the theological dimension of scripture, Thompson allows his doctrine of scripture to become a somewhat defensive apologetic, falling into the tendency of both liberal and evangelical theologies of scripture to permit the historical dimension of scripture to become pivotal. For example, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are clearly two quite different accounts of creation, diverging substantially in terms of their 'historical' and 'scientific' detail. Yet each has a profound theological contribution. Similarly with the gospels, though markedly different 'historically', each offers a significantly distinctive theological perspective. Why not focus on the theological orientation and emphasis of scripture itself?

A properly theological theology of scripture would allow Thompson to be true too to the theological dimension of the 'entire messy process' that is the historical process of canon formation (p. 112; see also p. 110). Biblical scholars accept as axiomatic that older traditions within scripture are reused to address the needs of new situations. Matthew re-uses Mark in order to address a different community of believers from Mark's. The priestly community who consolidate the book of Genesis re-use Genesis 2 when they add Genesis 1 before it, ensuring that both creation theologies have a voice. Scriptural theological production incorporates scriptural theological reception. In this regard the insightful reflection in Chapter 2, 'The Speaking God', and Chapter 3, 'From the Speech of God to "the Word of God Written"', tends to be undone by the more apologetic chapters that follow – Chapter 4, 'The Character of Scripture (Part 1): Clarity and Truthfulness' and Chapter 5, 'The Character of Scripture (Part 2): Sufficiency and Efficacy'. The speaking, communicative, relational God of Chapter 2, drawing on notions of speech-act theory (p. 69), and the God who writes (p. 90) of Chapter 3, offer resources for a fully theological account of scripture's theological production as scriptural reception. Communities of faith across diverse times and places strive to hear the God who speaks and faithfully to interpret the God who writes. The sources they hear and read and re-use are the oral and written 'texts' produced by prior communities of faith, and the products of their re-use become sources for subsequent reception and re-use. Such theological re-use may be engaged in conversation (i.e. the juxtaposition of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2), or dialogue (Matthew's re-use of Mark), or even contestation (Job's re-use of Proverbs) with what has been received. The theological task is not to elide such re-use but to understand it, so as to be able to engage in responsible theological appropriation.

Thompson is correct to characterize this as a 'messy process' (p. 112), and to confirm that '[t]he processes by which the biblical texts were created varied enormously' (p. 99). Biblical scholarship, which Thompson accepts as a resource

for faithful scriptural interpretation and for the construction of a theology of scripture – referring, for example, to the diversity and importance of biblical languages (pp. 17, 164), the validity of translation (p. 104), the range of different genres (p. 105), the different canons (p.113), textual variants (p. 115), archaeology (p. 154), and so on – provides considerable access and insight into the process of scriptural formation. What it does not provide, however, is a Bible ‘in a stable written form’ (p. 97). Theologians might yearn for such a stable form, but the Bible itself resists being so constrained, which is why theologians have to work so hard to construct any particular doctrine of scripture. Thompson leans heavily on the notion of ‘comparing Scripture with Scripture’, which he argues ‘allows the God-breathed word to stand as the final authority rather than the pronouncements of church authorities or the judgments of even the most faithful and orthodox of scholars’ (p. 128). The problem, however, is that it is precisely these church authorities and theologians whose particular theological orientations determine how scripture is compared to scripture and what particular scriptural theological orientation frames the comparison. This is not a theologically innocent process. Thompson elides here those who do this work and who claim that their particular understanding of scripture interpreting scripture is the authoritative voice of Scripture. Later, Thompson does acknowledge the authorising role of systematic theology, arguing that systematic theology, ‘properly conceived’, ‘digs deeper into Scripture to expose the connections between the various aspects of the truth it teaches’ (p. 165).

But Thompson does point us to a way forward, offering a path beyond the controlling constraints of particular biblical theologies. He cites William Whitaker, who resists those who would keep the people ‘from reading the Scriptures because they are so obscure as that they cannot be understood by laics, women, and the vulgar’, advocating, on the contrary, ‘that the Scriptures are not so difficult but that they may be read with advantage, and ought to be read, by the people’ (p. 128). This confirms my own experience in reading scripture with ordinary Christian believers, often those on the margins of the church, often those who have been driven from the church by the scriptural interpretation of particular doctrines of scripture. Ordinary people of Christian faith have little difficulty engaging with the detail and diversity of the Bible, recognizing in the diversity and detail of scripture the God who speaks and writes to them. They have little difficulty too with an unstable Bible, for it is the so-called ‘stable’ Bible that has often been used as a weapon over against them.

A final word is perhaps appropriate given the site of Thompson’s book (an Anglican seminary) and the site of this review (an Anglican journal). There is little that is overtly ‘Anglican’ about Thompson’s doctrine of scripture. Indeed, the term ‘Anglican’ does not occur anywhere in the book. Even where one might anticipate some engagement with Anglican notions of, for example, ‘*sola Scriptura*’ (p. 163), given Anglican grapplings with the relationship of scripture to church tradition and to reason and to context and to experience, there is none.

Gerald West
The University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa