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Political Theology and the New Testament

NEIL ELLIOTT

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The theology of liberation has arguably been the preeminent contemporary attempt to carry out a politically responsible theology since its beginnings in the late twentieth century. Its practitioners insist on beginning with “a solid knowledge of the real situation” in which “the gospel is proclaimed,” including a “thorough analysis,” social, political, and economic, “of the situation in which the church and today’s humankind are living.”¹

In the early twenty-first century, an adequate attempt at that task must take account of the reigning neoliberal global order² and of the stark incompatibility of that order with any realistic prospects for the survival of many of the planet’s species. Millions of human beings are already endangered, given the accelerating pace of anthropogenic climate change.³ Indeed, material deprivation in the sprawling “zones of social abandonment” that seem inherently necessary to capitalism’s continuation constitutes the primary context in which theology is carried out. The failure of liberation theology’s proliferating progeny to sustain attention, let alone resistance, to such deprivation in the form of a meaningful socialist alternative marks the theological challenge of our era.⁴

We must also take account today of the rise of nationalist and quasi-fascist political movements throughout the developed Global North. These are often fueled, as in the United States, by long-lived cultural currents and institutional forms of misogyny and racism, the latter the enduring legacy of slavery. In the absence of a vibrant, coherent, and intersectional political Left, these movements serve to channel the frustrations of a proportionately declining demographic—white males who protest the loss of privileges previously afforded them by racist and kyriarchal cultural forms⁵—into resentment and violence toward ethnic and gender minorities and women, and especially against immigrants and refugees fleeing deteriorating prospects for life in the beleaguered Global South.

Finally, theology must describe and resist the rhetorical and ideological camouflage given to that resentment by ultraconservative forms of Christianity. So much was made clear by the course of the 2016 US presidential campaign and its eventual result. White evangelicals and white supremacists alike perceived in the incoming administration the promise of restoring some measure of white privilege⁶ and normalizing an aggressively heterosexist patriarchy; that it also rolled back even modest limits on corporate, financial, military, and autocratic power was regarded as a rebuke to a secularist elite.⁷ If today we

are approaching the demographic “end of White Christian America,”⁸ that end apparently will not come without a fierce struggle. Yet as Jones shows, many white “mainline” churches are preoccupied with wresting the title away from white evangelicals, thus perpetuating in mutated form the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the twentieth century, rather than addressing the urgent crises of the twenty-first.

To focus here on US society is not to indulge its imagined self-importance. It is to acknowledge the devastating effects of US corporate, governmental, and military support for the neoliberal order, as well as the worldwide reach of US material and electronic culture. Even as credentialed pundits in the US have puzzled over the naked ambition of self-styled evangelical leaders, observers elsewhere have readily enough identified their protégés as “the propagators of a new slave religion,” “black and latinx . . . prosperity gossellers” bringing “a new Christian fundamentalism” in thrall to capitalist ideology, “with . . . devastating consequences for the peoples of the Global South.”⁹

In this toxic ideological mix, the Bible continues to enjoy undimmed glory as “America’s iconic book,”¹⁰ even as ever-greater majorities admit never to have read it.¹¹ If South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement could calculate in the 1980s that the Bible remained its best resource among “very limited ideological options,”¹² a different calculus seems to apply in the US, where the Bible’s prestige is often pressed into service to sustain a “counterrevolutionary situation.”¹³ Unless political theology is grounded in an ideological-critical assessment of this situation, appeals to the New Testament as authorizing resource risk simply reinscribing unspoken, yet powerful assumptions about biblical authority that, in the current context, are normally retrograde.

THE NEOLIBERAL CAPTIVITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the US, a handful of New Testament phrases exert disproportionate power, in public discourse as well as ecclesiastical life, as condensed divine sanctions for kyriarchal relationships and social indifference to the poor and underprivileged. The “omnipresent” declaration that “The poor you always have with you” (Mt 26:11 par.) is wielded as axiomatic proof that poverty is inevitable, irreversible, and the fault of the poor themselves.¹⁴ The Pauline admonition that “the one who is unwilling to work should not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10) has become a watchword in Congressional debates to restrict funding for food supplements to the poor.¹⁵ The pseudo-Pauline household codes have been invoked so routinely in constraining women’s aspirations to equality and preserving patriarchal privilege that their citation has been regarded as a practical measure of the likelihood of domestic violence¹⁶ and a buttress of anti-feminist policy alike.¹⁷ And, as almost quaint vestiges of a bygone past when conservatism was still yoked to meek conformity to government, the admonitions to “render unto Caesar” (Mt 22:15–22 par.) and “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1–7) are cited by prominent religious advisers to marshal Evangelical support whenever right-wing governmental policy faced popular dissent, though such invocations have been absent, for example, when more centrist administrations have proposed modest reforms, or when heavily armed right-wing militias have occupied federal property.

Whatever exegetical discussions have taken place among specialists regarding the “correct” interpretation of any of these passages, they have failed to dim their rhetorical power in public life. Outside of the US, similar patterns of the Bible’s deployment in strategically selective ways prevail, as witnessed from the UK by James Crossley¹⁸ and from the Global South by the Kairos documents of 1988 (South Africa) and 1989 (Central

America, Africa, and Asia).¹⁹ Evidently, in the present ideological context, key biblical texts serve less often as moral compass points than to provide “flak” for the dominant propaganda system.²⁰ Any approach to a responsible political theology must take this context, and the challenge of disarming a weaponized Bible, with utmost seriousness.

Instead, however, the New Testament is more regularly appropriated as a resource for preaching and theologizing from a posture of presumed ideological and even critical innocence. So, for example, even a renowned New Testament scholar has proclaimed that his own theological interpretation of the apostle Paul derives, not from a particular socioeconomic location, but from “[his] own acquaintance with Paul,” and expressed approval of “the vast majority of Christians in the world today” who “read Paul with blissful ignorance” of critical interpretive issues.²¹ Such homey disavowal of critical method, let alone of ideological awareness, perpetuates a popular understanding of the Bible as a text uniquely unconditioned by history and thus capable of mediating direct knowledge and experience of the divine will.

The claim to historical naiveté evades the ideological constraints evident in the production of texts and their subsequent reception alike.²² In the case of the New Testament, that claim evades the historical intertwining of Christianity, colonialism, capitalism, and enslavement begun in the original theological displacement of one people, Israel, by another,²³ and threatens to render invisible to mainstream theology the continued crucifixion of peoples under racially inflected capitalism.²⁴ The constraints of capitalist thought are evident when “liberal” interpreters are satisfied to affirm social inclusiveness, the “social glue” of an inherently unjust order.²⁵

Such constraints are not irresistible. Karl Kautsky already described the emergence of early Christianity against the horizon of the revolutionary potential of its origins and recognized that this potential was lost even as the movement spread ever outward from Judea. Eventually, “The destruction of Jerusalem meant that there was no longer any basis for an independent class movement of the Jewish proletariat.”²⁶ Such plain language alarmed others, however, who are normally hailed today as scholarship’s hallowed ancestors while Kautsky is banished from more decorous collective memory. “Absolute nonsense” was Max Weber’s dismissal, for example. For the early Christians, “worldly aims were dangerous,” and because of the expected “permanence of Roman rule until the end of time,” they allegedly considered it “hopeless to strive for social reform.” Such calculated despair led instead to “Christian love—purely ethical, charitable, and transcendental,” and thus inherently apolitical.²⁷ Correspondingly, more recent interpreters have spoken of the “love patriarchy” of Paul’s communities in Asia Minor and Greece²⁸ or of the “mutualism” practiced by those communities as an urban “survival strategy.”²⁹ Such observations implicitly corroborate Kautsky’s description of Christianity in the environment of Greco-Roman cities, pointing to the material and ideological constraints on those communities. They fail, however, to emphasize (as Kautsky did) the distance from more emancipatory possibilities and the probable compromise of Paul’s own purposes as well.³⁰

Without such historical contextualization, an approach devoted to extrapolating patterns of political thought and action from the New Testament texts will inevitably be limited by the focus in those texts on individual piety, acts of charity, and affective bonds within the community, cast against an expectation of imminent divine intervention and reward for the virtuous. Such focus on deductive method, equating what was with all that could have been, restricts the horizon of the possible for political theology today. But the limitation to individual virtue, rather than collective political and planetary responsibility, is one we can no longer afford—if we ever could.³¹

Conversely, because of the ideological constraints of the first century—especially the presumption of kyriarchy in divine and human realms alike that informed messianic thought as well as imperial propaganda³²—attempts to trace “nonconformist” impulses³³ through the New Testament writings might inevitably be partial and suggestive, at best, for serious contemplation of our own responsibilities. Such attempts are nevertheless valuable for counteracting, on one side, the popular understanding that conservative politics, Anglo-American exceptionalism, and unbridled capitalism simply *are* the politics and economics of the Bible, and, on the other, the insistence that the New Testament writings are primarily concerned with individual salvation and are thus on principle indifferent to politics and the political.

THE POLITICS OF READING THE POLITICS OF JESUS

It may prove useful to briefly survey what are still the dominant patterns of reading political themes and tropes from the New Testament writings.

The search for the “politics of Jesus” has proceeded in tandem with the search for the “historical Jesus.” If late nineteenth-century European scholarship understood Jesus as a teacher of wise and congenially liberal ethics, Albert Schweitzer argued that he was driven instead by an intense expectation of divine intervention, more compatible with a modern world-mysticism than with a rationally developed ethics.³⁴ The subsequent effort to restore Jesus to his historical context as an eschatologically minded first-century Jew led S. G. F. Brandon³⁵ to the provocative thesis that Jesus and his family had shared the ardent and, ultimately, disastrous religious nationalism of the Zealots. The thesis was repudiated as misguided and speculative, or ignored by a majority of scholars, who instead relied on Gospel *logia*, regarded as authentic (an agenda established by Bultmann),³⁶ that depicted Jesus teaching renewal through the individual’s transformation³⁷ and nonviolent resistance.³⁸

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, scholars began to recognize the de-Judaizing effect of Bultmann’s criterion of “double dissimilarity,” and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and counterinsurgency wars in Central America, some sought to restore Jesus to a context of material and political oppression and popular resistance to it.³⁹ The adoption of social-scientific perspectives promoted the thesis that Jesus’ significance had less to do with his teaching of individual ethics than with his founding of (or participation in)⁴⁰ a social movement in Galilean villages, variously characterized as promoting egalitarian relationships; rejecting patronage and debt; repudiating purity laws, understood as inherently discriminatory toward the poor; restoring covenantal values at the level of agrarian village life; sharing meals openly across social statuses; and performing healings and exorcisms as the rejection of social stigma or colonial subjection.⁴¹

The academic, popular, and homiletic interpretation of Jesus’ parables often betrays the influence of capitalist ideology. The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14–30; Lk. 19:12–27) readily yields itself to being read as a “call to wise investment,” indeed, as Jesus’ “most direct teaching with respect to capital,” a metaphor for “the necessity of risk-taking for the Kingdom of God.”⁴² There are other possible readings, informed by first-century agrarian values,⁴³ but these have been dismissed (when they have received attention at all) as the “unlikely” fantasy of “Marxist/liberationist hermeneutics.”⁴⁴ The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1–16) is almost universally read, and heard, as a repudiation of what Marx, or union members anywhere, might have called the labor theory of value; it is divine grace that all workers, regardless of their contribution,

are paid the same “generous” amount as defined by an all-knowing owner who is disposing of his private property. William Herzog II⁴⁵ argued, to the contrary, that, freed from their artificial (and artificially allegorical) editorial framing in the Gospels, Jesus’ parables constituted a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” conscientizing peasants into the largely unseen but exploitive dynamics of the Roman economy. Here, the main character is not a God figure, but an abusive and expropriating landowner who deliberately humiliates the laborers he has hired in stages so as to maximize profit. (The NRSV’s gloss of *δηνάριον* with “the usual daily wage” is questionable.)⁴⁶ But Herzog’s important work has received scant attention; Luise Schottroff is a lonely exception.⁴⁷

Despite impulses toward a more political reading of Jesus, however, important voices have insisted that the action most likely to have brought Jesus under Roman suspicion, then condemnation to be crucified—the attack on moneychangers’ tables in the Temple (Mt. 21:12–17; Mk. 11:15–19; Lk. 19:45–48; John effectively removes the linkage, 2:13–16)—was not politically motivated, but was a symbolic gesture, at home in “Jewish restoration eschatology,” predicting the divine destruction and eventual restoration of the Temple⁴⁸—if, indeed, it happened at all.⁴⁹ Jesus may be hailed now as a *social* revolutionary, promoting communitarian values, but the hypothesis that his action might have been part of broader anti-Roman activity remains marginalized—though no less plausible for that.⁵⁰

This sample cannot pretend to comprehend the breadth and variety of contemporary discussion. It may suffice to highlight the relevant questions for any attempt at interpreting Jesus for a political theology: How should we weigh our various sources (e.g., Mark, Q, Thomas, Josephus)? What role should we give different kinds of evidence (e.g., Jesus’ actions vs. his words)? Which historical analogies are relevant (Greek symposia; itinerant philosophers; rabbinic schools; peasant insurrections)? And perhaps most important: Do we seek to read a coherent, practicable “politics of Jesus” from the Gospels, taking their narratives more or less at face value, or do we recognize the historical dimensions of his failure, that he “died in complete rupture with his own cause”?⁵¹

THE POLITICS OF READING THE POLITICS OF PAUL

The last question is only exacerbated when we move from the historical Jesus to the earliest written expressions of the conviction that God raised him from the dead. With the apostle Paul, we enter a dramatically different historical landscape, the urban environment of the Greek-speaking East (and the Jewish diaspora there). Here, references to the political contours of Jesus’ own activity in Galilee and Judaea are nonexistent. The political character of his death is alluded to in quasi-numinous phrases that remain cryptically ambiguous for most scholars (“the rulers of this age,” 1 Cor. 2:8; “dominion, authority, and power,” 1 Cor. 15:24). Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the question of “Paul’s politics” could be summarily answered by reference to the notorious admonition in Romans 13:1–7 to “be subject to the governing authorities,” either inspiring contentment among better-situated readers or scorn among those agitating for social change. The effect of the household codes in the “deutero-Pauline” writings, even when these were recognized as pseudepigraphic, was to domesticate perceptions of Paul’s own social views, e.g., in the interpretation of Philemon or the translation of 1 Corinthians 7:24.⁵² Sympathetic readers excused Paul’s relative indifference to social inequity and injustice by pointing to his conviction that Christ’s return (and its presumed resolution of injustices) was near, and to his preoccupation with defending the inclusion of non-Jews in his assemblies—a theme that seems to limit appropriation of Paul to the liberal politics of inclusion.

Attempts to describe Paul as a more “liberative” figure have relied on reading some of his language as (not just “theological” but) a deliberate, though veiled, contestation of imperial ideological claims. He gathered “assemblies” (ἐκκλησίας) around the triumphant proclamation (εὐαγγέλιον) of a “lord” (κύριος), a “son of God” (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), who would bring about divine justice (δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ) and “rule the nations” (ἄρχεῖν τὰ ἔθνη). His goal was to secure the “obedience” (ὕπακοή) and holy self-offering of the nations (προσφορά τῶν ἔθνων), through the name of this lord, to God. That these phrases had political resonances within imperial propaganda and cult is now widely recognized, after decades of investigation of “Paul and politics” and “Paul and empire.”⁵³ But whether Paul intended to evoke those resonances implicitly and challenge them in a partially “hidden transcript,”⁵⁴ or, whatever his intention, whether readers or hearers would have perceived such resonances, remains a matter of intense scholarly debate.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, interrogations of the notions of “empire” and “imperialism” in terms of Hellenistic philosophical discourse about kingship⁵⁶ and rhetoric, popular among a provincial elite, about self-control⁵⁷ also bear on the interpretation of Paul’s *topoi*. The more intimate negotiations of ethnic, gender, and social differences press for attention as well,⁵⁸ as do questions of Paul’s engagement with slavery⁵⁹ and economic disparity.⁶⁰

Where an earlier scholarship could lay Paul’s allegedly accommodationist social ethic to the account of his anticipation of an imminent divine resolution of social ills,⁶¹ in the latter half of the twentieth century, Paul could be understood as accommodating himself, inevitably, to a social order characterized by “ambiguous” social status and moderate upward mobility.⁶² As Steven Friesen showed, a so-called “new consensus,” hailed by Wayne A. Meeks and others, actually reprised the early twentieth-century repudiation of class struggle on the part of scholars (such as Adolf Deissmann and Adolf von Harnack) who were determined, in opposition to the inroads of socialism, “to deny a need for structural change in German society” and to insist “that the gospel could transform the lower classes without disrupting the status quo because the gospel brought inner enlightenment and peace to individuals.”⁶³ The hypothesis of significant social stratification in Pauline assemblies (based on 1 Cor. 1:26: if “not many” were wise, powerful, nobly born, then presumably some were), with a rough “cross-section” of social statuses (advocates of the “new consensus” avoid the term *class*), serves similarly to deflect any implication that the Pauline mission had either a definite socioeconomic base or a sociopolitical agenda. Paul’s assemblies necessarily met in the more capacious houses of wealthier members and thus inevitably yielded to the established social codes of patronage, even in the intimate space of domestic life, a compromise Paul himself promoted by insisting that the hungry “eat at home” (1 Cor. 11:17–34). But the patronage model has been challenged. Even in Corinth, members may have gathered in poorer—and more egalitarian—common spaces in *insulae*.⁶⁴ And in the context of scathing sarcasm throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul’s terse “eat at home” might be read as rebuke, not advice.⁶⁵

Remarkably, while professional New Testament scholars, steeped in historical method, have labored to establish the socioeconomic coordinates of Paul, his coworkers, and the members of his assemblies, Paul’s alleged radicalism has been made a cause célèbre among Leftist Continental philosophers including Slavoj Žižek,⁶⁶ Alain Badiou,⁶⁷ and Giorgio Agamben.⁶⁸ Their various appeals to the apostle have at times relied more on rhetorical flamboyance than careful historical or exegetical analysis, but their insistence that Paul’s thought is vitally relevant to contemporary political crises under neoliberal capitalism has made reconsideration of Paul’s relevance for political theology not only salient, but urgent.⁶⁹ Even more urgent is the recognition, amply demonstrated in the works discussed,

that the variety of characterizations of Paul and his audiences “are reflective more of the categories, inclinations, and desires of the proximate present than of the distant past.”⁷⁰ The posture of hermeneutical naïveté, discussed above, is also one we can no longer afford.

THE POLITICS OF READING THE POLITICS OF THE GOSPELS

Space does not allow a close reading of each of the canonical Gospels. Some interpretive issues have been discussed above vis-à-vis the politics of Jesus. Here it is relevant to observe that one important development in recent scholarship on the Gospels has been the resurgence within some academic circles of a popular, traditionalist view of the Gospels. That is, in reaction to the earlier form-critical and redactional-critical synthesis of Bultmann and his successors, according to which the Gospels were the products of anonymous communities both in the creation and transmission of oral tradition and in their eventual commitment to papyrus, we find the continuing insistence that the Gospels were intended primarily to preserve memories of Jesus after the death of the disciples;⁷¹ indeed, that they were intended historiographically, to make the testimonies of eyewitnesses available as widely as possible to the broader church;⁷² even in the increasingly variegated proliferation of gospels, every instance of “gospel writing” is “a movement forward that is also intended as a movement backward to Jesus himself.”⁷³ Over against such “innocent” views of the Gospels we must pose characterizations of them as “identity-confirming narratives,”⁷⁴ “Christian propaganda.”⁷⁵

It bears note that the rise of a distinct discipline of “political theology” coincided with cultural, political, and theological efforts in post-Second World War Europe and the United States to come to terms with the catastrophic compatibility of some construals of Christianity with Nazism (e.g., the Deutsche Christen movement). Other postwar realities as well weighed heavily: an international Cold War between atomic superpowers, styled in the West as a mortal struggle between freedom and Communism; the hot wars of insurgency and counterinsurgency those superpowers delegated to their surrogates amid worldwide struggles for decolonization and self-government; and the “war against the poor” carried out through and beyond all these efforts.⁷⁶ The legacy of anti-Semitism weighed heavily enough that by the 1970s and 1980s, exposing and repudiating the “roots” of Christian supersessionism had become a fundamental agendum of New Testament studies.⁷⁷ Less so, however, the other concerns just named, which together constitute a pervasive supersessionism toward the poor and dispossessed that capitalist ideology has continued to represent as both natural and inevitable.

Against such supersessionism stand several historical judgments. Paula Fredriksen has observed, with typical concision, that “given Jesus’ manner of death” on a Roman cross, “we can only assume that Pilate, and not the High Priest or the Sanhedrin, was responsible” for it.⁷⁸ But, she continues, “the task of the trial narratives [in the Gospels] is to reverse the burden of that responsibility in the face of the fact, too central to the tradition to be dropped or altered, that Jesus died on a cross.”⁷⁹ The accounts of Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin, “tendentious and artificial, do not inspire confidence”; their purpose is to emphasize that Jesus “died for religious reasons (hence at Jewish instigation), not political ones (hence not at Roman initiative).”⁸⁰ As for the trial before Pilate, the governor’s “reported conduct as reluctant judge is scarcely credible as history, but it was very

important theologically and politically” to the communities who produced the Gospels.⁸¹ The scene, common to all four Gospels, where the Jews of Jerusalem cry out for the release of a rebel and a murderer at the cost of the life of an innocent man—indeed, of the messiah, a teacher of peace and righteousness, very son of God—is “absolutely unhistorical.”⁸² Jesus’ crucifixion—the Roman punishment of the seditious—clearly indicates his status “as a political figure,” yet the Gospels exert themselves to argue otherwise.⁸³ After the catastrophic war of 66–73 CE, Fredriksen summarizes, the church “had every reason to want to assure prospective Gentile audiences that the Christian movement neither threatened nor challenged imperial sovereignty the way the Jewish people had,” and they sought to achieve that purpose through the Passion narratives.⁸⁴

Scholars have exerted themselves to demonstrate the radical, egalitarian, socially revolutionary, or counter-imperial impulses not just of Jesus (see above) but of the Gospel writers as well.⁸⁵ But whatever exegetical acumen might be brought to bear on one or another Gospel passage, plot turn, or redactional feature, it is incumbent, especially on theologically minded *Christian* readers, to recognize that they were written to achieve simultaneously the inculcation of the Jews and Pilate’s exculpation for Jesus’ death,⁸⁶ which means the *depoliticization* of Jesus’ life and death alike. It follows that any responsible political theology must approach the Gospels, and their portrayal of (for lack of a better phrase) Jesus’ politics, with a thorough-going and well grounded suspicion of that agenda. Nor will it suffice to present hypotheses regarding one or another anonymous sectarian community to explain the perspective of an Evangelist. A politically sensitive theology must ask how the construal of each narrative served to shape the subsequent Christian imagination in its dread intertwining with colonialism, slavery, and capitalist dispossession.⁸⁷

INTERROGATING THE LEGACY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

It is now routine to describe the subsequent appropriation and re-interpretation of earlier New Testament writings in subsequent Christian generations: the Jesus tradition (or “movement”) partly effaced by the Gospels; the Johannine community’s devolution into intra-ecclesial contention and, eventually, Gnosticism; Paul’s message extended (on one view) or subverted (on another) by the pseudo-Pauline epistles and beyond;⁸⁸ the eventual erasure of the very possibility of “Jewish Christianity” at the hands of Ignatius, the Epistle of Barnabas, and Melito of Sardis. The anti-Roman, “revolutionary” fury of the Revelation to John was clear enough to Friedrich Engels;⁸⁹ when its spirit emerged a century later as the “New Prophecy,” it was swiftly condemned as a heresy, and still later, Augustine defended Christianity from its pagan despisers after the fall of Rome by allegorizing its two cities—smoldering “Babylon” and the heavenly Jerusalem—as the project of Roman civilization and the church as a loyal opposition within it (*The City of God*).

Professional biblical scholarship remains preoccupied with questions of historical origins and the original intent of texts. A political theology attuned to our historical situation must be equally preoccupied with the historical transmutations of meanings over the centuries and, not least, with the effects of the active ideological deployment of biblical tropes and phrases today. Seen from this perspective, some hermeneutical strategies will inevitably appear as tools of reactionary or revanchist cultural and political programs; others will declare their commitment to the enhancement of human striving and planetary sustainability in terms that properly sound revolutionary. Given the stakes, none of us

should aspire to a broad “middle ground” in which the faithful might “just read the Bible.” Such imagined innocence, however sincerely felt, is an abdication of responsibility.

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