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Review: Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur

John D. Morrison

Liberty University, jdmorrison@liberty.edu

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In contrast to many modern Biblical scholars, Howard asserts that "the intent of these historical writings is to provide an accurate account of the history of God's people, and their message is undermined if their historical accuracy is compromised." Consequently he succinctly asserts "that the Bible does indeed accurately record the events it portrays" (p. 36).

Howard also distinguishes his view on revelation from scholars who "argue that God's revelation was primarily through historical events. However, this overstates the case, and it does not properly account for the need for interpretation of such events (not to mention its deemphasis of the Bible's claim to be the Word of God)." Events like the thunder and lightning recorded in Exodus 19 needed to be interpreted by Moses. Consequently the record of these events and their interpretation are God's revelatory activities so that the "Scriptures themselves are revelation" (Cf. G. E. Wright, who asserts that the "Word of God" is present in Scripture but that Scripture itself is not the "Word").

Recognizing these books as revelatory, the author points out that they are not merely human words about God but also are God's words to humans. The authors of these historical narratives "consistently evaluate historical events from God's perspective," especially as they evaluate each king's reign in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Consequently these books are theological works that reveal much to us about God himself.

Noting that an analysis of the text—morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences—is essential to proper interpretation, Howard warns against Biblical scholarship that "has too often dissected, atomized, and analyzed biblical narratives until what is left is a dismembered corpse, not a living organism" (p. 58). Texts must also be analyzed—and read, not just "studied" or dissected—at the higher levels of sentences, paragraphs, episodes, books, and beyond to capture much of their vitality and meaning. Consequently standard critical questions are included in this introduction.

The author invites each reader of his *Introduction* to read the text of these books—Joshua to Esther—"to discover its revelation of God to us, to learn of His gracious plan of redemption, and to discern how to live." Emphasis on the messages of the books, themes, theologies and purpose are elucidated from the books as "texts" to guide the reader in understanding God's revelation through his written Word.

Howard's volume is a welcome addition as a textbook for seminary courses in OT introduction. For ministers it is a "must" in preaching from these OT historical books. In preparation for book studies, Howard's *Introduction* is invaluable.

Samuel J. Schultz
Lexington, MA

Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. By James Dicenso. University Press of Virginia, 208 pp., \$32.50.

Hermeneutics and the nature of truth are brought together and examined in this work, as the title clearly suggests. Recent decades have seen hermeneutics come to the center of both theological and philosophical discussion. Dicenso works here to bring to expression his particular concern via analysis and critique of particular influential strains of "truth as disclosure" as found in the thought of M. Heidegger, H. G. Gadamer and P. Ricoeur.

A revision of the author's Syracuse dissertation, this book is an important inclusion in the Studies in Religion and Culture series from the University Press of Virginia. Dicenso is concerned with the nature of truth, but specifically he wants to

clarify the superiority of the conception of truth as disclosure for the human existential situation in its finitude. In addition, truth as disclosure enhances the (apparently supreme) good of human freedom and plurality by overthrowing traditional notions of truth, which create "ideal," more "static," and thus "repressive" truth structures that have no capacity for reflexivity, self-criticism and interchange of perspective.

Dicenso opens his discussion with brief exposition, analysis and then negation of the traditional notions of truth: correspondence and coherence. The first is only usable in "ontic" (in contrast with "ontological") knowing of mere objects. The second finally requires an "absolute" perspective on the scale of Hegel's system, though some aspects of coherence are carried over into disclosure. Then, beginning with Heidegger's development of truth as disclosure, Dicenso erects and fortifies the notion of disclosive truth as it has come to maturity through Ricoeur. Though not the "discoverer," Heidegger initiated development of truth as disclosure in his monumental *Being and Time* and then more fully in his subsequent works on being in relation to language. But it was Gadamer, Dicenso says, who more effectively "historicized" disclosive truth and thereby related it more to the human existential and linguistic (textual) nature of life in the twentieth century (cf. *Truth and Method*). Dicenso, however, finds that Gadamer too falls short, his understanding of the reader-text relation losing the sense of "otherness" by his fusion of the reader's horizon of interpretation to that of the text in a falsely "dialogical" manner. It is rather Ricoeur whom Dicenso finds to have most effectively advanced Heidegger's truth as disclosure insight and Gadamer's historicity of disclosure to full bloom. Ricoeur grasps truth as disclosure and the existential and therefore historical and above all linguistic nature of truth (human language forming one's own interpretive perspective, or "world," which creatively "clashes" with that of others). Advancing beyond Gadamer, Ricoeur perceives that the text presents the reader with other "worlds" that, in the meeting, transform the reader's interpretive context and thereby his/her mode-of-being. According to Dicenso (though not necessarily for Ricoeur) this critical, reflexive attention to the ways in which interpretations govern action is truth. This, he says, enhances the freedom and the recognition of interdependency of finite beings. A wonderful sentiment indeed.

Dicenso's discussions of these three highly influential philosophers, whose work has had and is having a major effect on Biblical hermeneutics and theology, are both relatively succinct and insightful. Yet like A. J. Ayer it seems that Dicenso's position cannot hold up to its own requirements. He yearns for "freedom" from the fixity and repression of earlier notions of truth, which he believes will be found in a notion of truth having no actual ground beyond human subjectivity. How could that bring interdependency and freedom? Here truth is relativism, despite Dicenso's protestations. "Truth as disclosure" does have much potential, and Ricoeur's thinking too has much potential value for evangelical theology (cf. K. Vanhoozer's recent work on Ricoeur). But Dicenso's form is found wanting.

John Morrison
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Man and Creation: Perspectives on Science and Theology. Edited by Michael Bauman. Hillsdale: Hillsdale College, 1993, 306 pp., \$9.95 paper.

Where in the world is God? That is the question that this provocative book debates. Two essays set the stage for the debate.

First, M. A. Kalthoff gives a brief, historical overview of the relationship between science and theology. Some polemicists claim that religion has always been hostile to science, but Christian apologists have frequently insisted that the rise of modern sci-

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