Common Ground and Diversity in Early Christian Thought and Study

Edited by
RAIMO HAKOLA,
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Essays in Memory of Heikki Räisänen

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Raimo Hakola is Senior Lecturer at the University of Helsinki and co-director of the archaeological excavations conducted by the Kinneret Regional Project at Horvat Kur, Galilee.
orcid.org/0000-0001-6724-5959

Outi Lehtipuu is Senior Lecturer at the University of Helsinki and the leader of the research project Lived Scriptures in Late Antiquity.
orcid.org/0000-0003-1734-5059

Nina Nikki is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki.
orcid.org/0000-0003-3748-8129

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Preface

Approximately six years ago, the news reached us that Heikki Räisänen, professor emeritus of New Testament Studies at the University of Helsinki, had passed away. Räisänen continues to be the best-known Finnish biblical scholar internationally with academic interests and scholarly networks extending wide and far. When we decided to publish a volume of collected essays in Heikki's memory, it was not difficult to attract contributors from among both his international collaborators and his former students and colleagues from his home department. Nor was it difficult to include a range of topics that all are, in one way or another, in dialogue with Heikki's scholarship.

Some of the essays in this collection were first offered as oral presentations in a commemoratory symposium entitled *Ancient Christianity and Judaism: Paradigm Changes – In Memory of Heikki Räisänen* held in Helsinki in 2017. We wish to thank the Finnish Exegetical Society and its board, who were responsible for organizing the event. The symposium not only looked to the past but also to the present and the future in discussing the advances and transformations in some of the research areas in which Heikki was involved. Our aim has been to retain the same spirit in this publication.

This book would not have materialized without the help and support we have received from several people. Jarkko Vikman took care of the copy-editing and prepared the manuscript for publication. Kenneth Lai, Bob Whiting, and Rod McConchie edited the English of the chapters that were written by non-native speakers. Markus Kirchner and Ilse König from Mohr Siebeck offered their professional expertise in the publication process. We are happy to acknowledge our gratitude to all of them, as well as to professor Jörg Frey for accepting the book in the prestigious *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* series.

Our sincerest thank you goes to all contributors to this volume. Thank you for your patience – the volume was in its final stages when the global pandemic broke out at the beginning of 2020 and disrupted everything. But first and foremost, thank you for your fine contributions. We believe that Heikki would have enjoyed reading them.

Helsinki, on Heikki Räisänen's 80th birthday, December 10, 2021

Raimo Hakola, Outi Lehtipuu, and Nina Nikki

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Common Ground and Diversity in Early Christian Thought and Study

An Introduction

Raimo Hakola, Outi Lehtipuu, and Nina Nikki

During his long scholarly career, Heikki Räisänen (1941–2015) touched upon many key questions in the study of early Christianity. The topics of his research ranged from the detailed study of various New Testament writings to methodological reflections on the theoretical foundations of biblical studies. In this book, Finnish and international scholars deal with many of the issues that were prominent in Räisänen's research and that continue to be debated. The contributors build upon Räisänen's legacy as well as present recent advancements in the study of early Christianity. The volume comprises four sections organized around topics central to Räisänen's scholarship. These include methodological "fair play," the non-confessional study of early Christianity, Pauline scholarship, and biblical reception in religious communities, including early Islam.

1. Early Christianity in Context: Comparisons and Fair Play

The first section of the book deals with one of the methodological benchmarks of Räisänen's scholarship that he formulated as the principle of "fair play."[1] This principle requires that biblical texts be treated similarly to other ancient sources and the methods that are prominent in the study of corresponding social and cultural phenomena should be used in the study of early Christianity. This methodological point of departure may seem to be self-evident and even trivial, but the history of New Testament and early Christian studies until recently suggests that this is not the case. Biblical scholars working from a Christian

[1] Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2000), 156–70; "What I Meant and What It Might Mean … An Attempt at Responding," in *Moving Beyond New Testament Theology? Essays in Conversation with Heikki Räisänen*, ed. Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 88 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 428–530; *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 3–6; *The Bible among Scriptures and Other Essays*, WUNT 392 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 8–9, 27.

background have quite often sought historical arguments to back up the Christian confession of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. In the 19th century and into the early 20th century, attempts to depict Jesus as exceptional often went hand in hand with the denigration of his Jewish contemporaries and resulted in the persistent tradition of Christian academic anti-Judaism.[2] Since World War II, mainstream Christian New Testament scholarship has struggled to shake off the long shadow of Christian anti-Judaism but old caricatures of Christianity's superiority over Judaism are deep-rooted and are still visible in some interpretations that present Jesus as the spokesman of the poor, the suppressed, and women while Judaism is painted as hierarchical, oppressive and misogynistic.[3] The popularity of many classical themes of Christian anti-Jewish propaganda among supporters of such recent conspiracy theories as QAnon shows that ethically responsible academic scholarship cannot cease its fight against anti-Semitic (mis)uses of the New Testament.[4]

The attempts to elevate Jesus above his historical context are still alive in some quarters of New Testament study. For example, in his influential book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham maintains that the historical assessment of the gospels "must also take seriously the testimony's claim to the radical exceptionality of the event."[5] Bauckham is not a lonely voice but joins numerous earlier Christian scholars who have asserted that the beginnings of Christianity, the so-called Christ-event, was incomparable in its ancient context and, presumably, remains unsurpassed. This may or may not be a defensible theological doctrine, but, as Jonathan Z. Smith has persuasively argued, descriptions of early Christian history that are based on "the illicit transfer" from the ontological beliefs to the realm of historical probabilities and comparisons

[2] Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002); Raimo Hakola, "Anti-Judaism, Anti-Semitism in the New Testament and Its Interpretation," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27–35.

[3] Cf. Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Interpretation," in *Searching for Scriptures, Vol. 1: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 117–29; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 119–90.

[4] See Paul A. Djupe and Jacob Dennen, "The Anti-Semitism of Christian Nationalists Thanks to QAnon," *Religion in Public*, 26 January 2021, https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/01/26/the-anti-semitism-of-christian-nationalists-thanks-to-qanon (accessed April 12, 2022). Their study conducted in October 2020 shows that 42.1 percent of QAnon supporters think that Jews killed Jesus and 34.1 percent that Jews think that they are better than others. Both of these fallacies have customarily been defended with references to the New Testament.

[5] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 499, 506. For the scholarly discussion following Bauckham's claim, see Raimo Hakola, *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity: A Social Identity Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 5–21.

are problematic.[6] In the field of New Testament studies, the emphasis on the uniqueness of early Christian beginnings amounts to "a special plea to treating the Gospels in a way that most other historical documents are not treated."[7] Furthermore, the use of such theological concepts as "testimony" means that "the Jesus of historians and the Christ of the faithful community converge, even though only for members of that community."[8] Bauckham may have been provocative in formulating his thesis, but Kari Syreeni suggests that many other recent studies come dangerously close to "surrendering to fideism" in applying the concept of memory as a bridge between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith or when they have tried to bring together Jesus and his "post-history" by arguing that the key points of early Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology ultimately derive from the historical Jesus.[9]

This use of memory studies offers a case in point about how scholars have often failed to follow the principle of fair play when they have applied interdisciplinary methodology to the New Testament. In fact, psychological and cognitive memory studies often approach memories as constructions that turn to the past to address the present, not as containers of reliable recollections.[10] There is no reason to think that early Christian individual or collective memories would have functioned differently. Quite the contrary, memory studies remind New Testament scholars of what they should have internalized at least

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[6] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 39.

[7] Kari Syreeni, "The Identity of the Jesus Scholar: Diverging Preunderstandings in Recent Jesus Research," in *The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices*, ed. Samuel Byrskog, Tom Holmén, and Matti Kankaanniemi, WUNT II 373 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 12.

[8] Syreeni, "Identity of the Jesus Scholar," 12–13. Confessional discussions that emphasize Jesus's exceptionality should be kept separate from genuinely comparative attempts to understand his originality in his historical contexts. See Per Bilde, "Approaching the Issue of the Originality of Jesus," in *The Identity of Jesus: Nordic Voices*, ed. Samuel Byrskog, Tom Holmén, and Matti Kankaanniemi, WUNT II 373 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 17–37.

[9] Syreeni, "Identity of the Jesus Scholar," 12, 15. Räisänen emphasized the gradual evolving and the diversity of early Christian beliefs in Jesus; see Räisänen, *Rise*, 192–227.

[10] See Judith C. S. Redman, "How Accurate Are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research," *JBL* 129 (2010): 177–97; John S. Kloppenborg, "Memory, Performance and the Sayings of Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10 (2012): 97–132; Zeba A. Crook, "Collective Memory Distortion and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 11 (2013): 53–76; Petri Luomanen, "How Religions Remember: Memory Theories in Biblical Studies and the Cognitive Study of Religion," in *Mind, Morality and Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. István Czachesz and Risto Uro, Bibleworld (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 24–42; Hakola, *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity*, 13–15. For a full assessment of memory studies in the study of the historical Jesus, see Tuomas Havukainen, *The Quest for the Memory of Jesus: A Viable Path or a Dead End?* CBET 99 (Leuven: Peeters, 2020), 275. Havukainen notes that "while the memory approach reasonably rejects any naïve notion about access to the historical actuality of Jesus, the concept of the remembered Jesus (or 'Jesus of testimony') ought not to be used to grant the Gospels a special status as historical sources."

from the heyday of form criticism: past events can become significant in promoting common group values even though the connection between the past and the present remains elusive and slim.[11] The concept of memory is helpful in highlighting various portraits of Jesus as socially constructed competing memories, not as accurate snapshots of the past. Following Räisänen's emphasis on the diversity of early Christianity, different memories about Jesus can be seen to represent alternative memory communities among early Christians.[12]

The principle of fair play challenges the use of concepts such as "orthodoxy" and "heresy" as neutral historical descriptions and emphasizes the diversity of early Christian traditions.[13] This is in line with a major development in the study of early Christianity, in which these concepts have increasingly been understood not as accurate descriptions of diverse early Christian groups but as instruments in the process of self-definition that is always achieved in relation to those experienced and excluded as others.[14] The portraits of groups and individuals who are perceived as opponents in New Testament writings are nowadays customarily seen as literary, rhetorical, and ideological constructs that helped shape and maintain particular Christian identities.[15] This development follows the basic axiom of historical studies according to which reconstructions based on the point of view of just one side in a conflict easily become biased. Instead, the standards of fair historical descriptions aim at doing justice to all involved parties.[16]

Räisänen maintained that academic scholarship cannot construct a full portrait of diverse early Christian groups without dismissing the artificial theological boundary between canonical and non-canonical writings.[17] Doing away with canonical boundaries not only helps draw attention to the diversity of

[11] Cf. Paul Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10 (2012): 202.

[12] For alternative memory communities in the eastern Mediterranean, see Susan E. Alcock, "The Reconfiguration of Memory in the Eastern Roman Empire," in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. Susan E. Alcock et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 323–50. See also Raimo Hakola's article in this collection.

[13] Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, 156–70; *Rise*, 3–6.

[14] Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknapp, 2003), 20–54; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 22–27; Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki, and Ulla Tervahauta, "Introduction," in *Others and the Construction of Early Christian Identities,* ed. Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki, and Ulla Tervahauta, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2013), 9–30; Ismo Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality Revisited*, WUNT 347 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[15] Nina Nikki, *Opponents and Identity in Philippians*, NovTSup 173 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 12–13.

[16] Räisänen's formulations of critical fair play look a lot like some attempts in the field of philosophy of history to define the characteristics of fair historical explanations; see C. Behan McCullagh, *The Truth of History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 13–61; *The Logic of History: Putting Postmodernism in Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004), 144–50.

[17] For example, Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 27–29.

early Christianity but can also illustrate how trajectories that are only in their early stages in the New Testament were developed later. For example, such a figure as the disciple whom Jesus loved in the Gospel of John is without parallel in other canonical gospels but similar figures in non-canonical Christian texts help us to see this figure as a part of a growing tendency to authenticate a particular rendering of the Jesus story as the only accepted version.[18] Scattered references to eyewitnesses in canonical gospels (Luke 1:1–4; John 21:24–25) reveal a tendency that becomes more articulated in non-canonical sources where numerous references to eyewitnesses create authorial fiction reflecting the need to legitimate diverse understandings of Jesus traditions among distinct early Christian groups.[19] Non-canonical sources may also encourage scholars to modify the search for the one and only original authorial meaning of a given New Testament passage because the scriptural heritage is often ambiguous enough to allow the emergence of various competing trajectories and plausible alternative interpretations.[20]

The essays in the first section of the book elaborate the consequences of the principle of fair play when the New Testament writings are placed in their larger comparative context in the ancient world. In her "The Uniqueness (or Not) of Jesus's Work as an Exorcist," Cecilia Wassén claims that many New Testament scholars still view Jesus as exceptional when his work as an exorcist is compared to his contemporaries. Wassén compares the gospel stories to what can be known about exorcisms in ancient Jewish sources such as Genesis Apocryphon, apocryphal psalms, and the works by Josephus. Wassén concludes that the possible theological implications of Jesus's exorcisms do not make him unique, but the available evidence suggests that he behaved in line with common exorcistic practices of his time even though these practices may appear primitive to a modern mind.

Antti Marjanen's article "The Radical Inclusion of Non-Canonical Texts in Heikki Räisänen's Reconstruction of the Thought World of Early Christians" examines how Räisänen's decision to include extracanonical early Christian sources has influenced his portrait of early Christian theologies. Marjanen shows that while canonical texts mostly provide the starting point for Räisänen's presentation, Räisänen has also chosen themes (for example, the transmigration of the soul, resurrection as a spiritual enlightenment) that originate and are devel-

[18] Cf. Ismo Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict? Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 165–98.

[19] Cf. Kari Syreeni, "Eyewitness Testimony, First-Person Narration and Authorial Presence as Means of Legitimation in Early Gospel Literature," in *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola, and Jutta Jokiranta, NTOA 116 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 89–110.

[20] For various debates arising from Paul's teachings about resurrection, for example, see Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

oped in non-canonical sources later labeled as "heretical." Marjanen shows how certain views related to resurrection have resurfaced in modern theological discussions even though they were once rejected by the mainstream Christian tradition because of their heretical connotations. The rehabilitation of these ideas suggests that the inclusion of non-canonical sources is not only necessary for a full portrait of early Christian history but can also stimulate present day hermeneutical discussions.

Jarmo Kiilunen's article "Looking for Parallels: A *Neutestamentler* Reads Marcus Aurelius" offers an insight into one of Räisänen's research project that came to a dead end. During the 1970s, Heikki Räisänen was involved in the international research project *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*, in which his planned study was to deal with the alleged parallels to the New Testament writings in Marcus Aurelius's work *Meditations*. Kiilunen describes how Räisänen meticulously traced similarities between the New Testament and the philosopher-emperor's work and recorded his observations in notes identifying more than 250 parallels or parallel phenomena. Kiilunen analyzes Räisänen's notes on Book XII of the *Meditations* and evaluates them critically. He also relates how Räisänen became increasingly frustrated with the inaccuracy of the concept of a parallel and finally entrusted the project to Kiilunen, who likewise soon realized the problems involved in defining parallels and recognizing them. Subsequently, scholars have continued to discuss the problem Räisänen and Kiilunen ran up against and tried to find adequate criteria for identifying what is similar between writings representing different intellectual movements and different literary genres.[21] While Räisänen initially grew impatient with the listing of parallels, he later returned to the comparison between early Christian writings and Stoicism. Contrary to what many scholars have claimed, Räisänen concluded that the fair comparison of moral discourses in early Christians sources such as Romans and 1 Peter and in Stoic texts shows that "Stoicism may seem to provide a more promising starting-point for inter-group cooperation than does Pauline (or 'Petrine') Christianity."[22]

2. History and Theology in the Study of Early Christianity

In his publications, Räisänen argued for a non-confessional and non-partisan approach to early Christianity whose results are accessible to anyone interested in the topic. The discussion of this aspect of Räisänen's program often resulted in exchanges in which Räisänen is made a representative of extreme post-enlight-

[21] For the methods in comparative studies on Christianity and Stoicism, see Niko Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law: A Comparison*, LNTS 405 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 11–19.

[22] Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 191.

enment positivistic attitudes allegedly still prominent in some quarters of mainstream New Testament scholarship. In his replies to his critics, Räisänen rightly resists this proposed straw man, claiming that the impossibility for a scholar to be fully neutral and objective has always been widely acknowledged among New Testament scholars.[23] Räisänen makes the important observation that the dividing line here is not the issue of subjectivity versus objectivity but whether Christian theological concerns guide research and whether scholars can appeal to theological concepts such as revelation or inspiration.[24] While the discussion about the limits of objectivity has often led to a dead end, Räisänen's observation opens a way forward by highlighting the importance of the contexts in which academic study is done, a point that has been emphasized in recent discussions in the field of philosophy of science.

The debate between Räisänen and his critics has not really touched upon the question of what scholars mean when they say that academic knowledge should be objective or when they deny that it is impossible to achieve a strictly neutral and uninvolved stance. According to the ontological notion of objectivity, we can have knowledge of the world existing independently of human observers, and the value-free ideal means that non-epistemic values should not influence scientific evidence and its interpretation. Both of these notions have been heavily criticized in recent philosophical discussions.[25] Such negative conclusions have led some theorists to abandon the whole concept of objectivity, while others try to define an applicable notion of objectivity that does not "imply that the results of objective research would be certain, as we need an account that allows us to be fallible."[26] In a similar way, the awareness that the results of scholarship are never final but may be overturned in the future has always been a core principle of *critical* biblical studies even though some critics of the historical scholarship have

[23] See with references to Räisänen's critics, Räisänen, "What I Meant," 420–25; *Bible among Scriptures*, 25–27. Cf. also John J. Collins, "Historical-Critical Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 136. Collins maintains that the concept of objectivity has never been a main principle of historical criticism. Collins says that "there is surely a general assumption in historical criticism that the meaning of a text can be established in an objective manner, but this assumption is more complicated than it may seem" because "the meaning intended by an ancient author can only be reconstructed tentatively, and texts clearly can take new meanings in new circumstances."

[24] Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 26–27. For a similar conclusion, see Christopher M. Tuckett, "What is 'New Testament Study'? The New Testament and Early Christianity," *NTS* 60 (2014): 164. While Tuckett acknowledges that "a strictly neutral, uninvolved stance on the part of any interpreter may be impossible," he remarks that existential involvement with the sources does not require "positive religious commitment" and that such a stance is not "adopted in any other field of academic study."

[25] Cf. Inkeri Koskinen, "Defending a Risk Account of Scientific Objectivity," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 71 (2020): 1187–207; "Objectivity in Contexts: Withholding Epistemic Judgement as a Strategy for Mitigating Collective Bias," *Synthese* 199 (2021): 211–25.

[26] Koskinen, "Defending," 1190.

painted a caricature of scholars who allegedly still continue the endless search for absolute truths.[27] The objectivity of scholarly research does not mean that the results of the study are presented as certain and definitive but that general public can rely on a research community that "follows practices that ensure effective critical discussions and debates – which we take to be an efficient strategy for averting many individual and collective biases."[28] In the field of biblical and cognate studies, an interactive research community consisting of scholars with varied ethnic, religious or non-religious, and other backgrounds can be relied on because scholars "cannot necessarily presume that [their] audience share the same confessional commitment" which means that "any explicit institutional confessional alignment is explicitly ruled out."[29]

Philosopher Inkeri Koskinen concludes that objectivity is not "an on-off feature" but "a degree concept."[30] Even though practitioners of academic research do not naively claim that their views are absolutely objective, the adherence to the critical practices accepted by an interactive and diverse research community increases the objectivity of a given interpretation and makes it more objective than some other interpretations made in other contexts (church, synagogue, personal piety) following different criteria (traditional dogmas, the supervision of religious authorities, the spirit). In biblical studies, John Collins has expressed this point by saying that, while historical criticism does not require that texts have a single meaning, academic research can effectively show that there are limits to what texts can plausibly mean in specific historical contexts.[31] Following Collins, it can be argued that some measure of objectivity in historical criticism's pursuit of the range of possible meanings is also ethically warranted because it safeguards the otherness of historical texts that do not simply belong to particular religious communities but are shared cultural heritage.

While Heikki Räisänen advocated a historical and nondenominational perspective that can provide unbiased information about early Christianity for the general audience and not just for believers, legitimate concerns have recently arisen within academia as to whether there is still public demand for this kind of approach. According to Jorunn Økland, the desire for historical accuracy has

[27] Collins, "Historical-Critical Methods," 136.

[28] Koskinen, "Defending," 1190. Koskinen provides a more detailed discussion of the concepts of trust and reliance in discourses of scientific objectivity.

[29] Tuckett, "What is 'New Testament Study,'" 166. Similarly, John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: The Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 11: "The assumptions governing the conversation [in biblical studies] may change, and have demonstrably changed over the last two generations, as the circle of participants has widened. … Assured results are those on which most people, for the moment, agree. Scholarship is a conversation, in which the participants try to persuade each other by appeal to evidence and criteria that are in principle acceptable to the other participants."

[30] Koskinen, "Defending," 1190.

[31] Collins, "Historical-Critical Methods," 141.

long been the driving force in critical biblical studies but this aim can no longer arouse public interest in the Bible in a secular, multireligious, and canonically illiterate world.[32] Økland proposes that reception history with its focus on familiar motifs that are "effective across times and cultures" and "expressed and preserved in a privileged form in the biblical texts" can still keep the Bible relevant. Økland remarks that the public wants to know "what might be in the Bible for me" but is not interested in "what the Bible really says about this and that."[33] While Økland's assessment of the importance of reception history as an essential and reformative part of biblical studies is to the point, public interest in what is historical in the biblical and related texts may vary according to context. Based on his own experiences with the media, Ismo Dunderberg remarks that what still creates media hype is controversies related to unconventional versions of biblical history (e.g., *The Da Vinci Code*) or to new archaeological or manuscript finds publicized as sensations.[34] The reason why media and the public turn to academic experts is because they want to know whether the "classical" or alternative versions of Christian history are true or false. This testifies to how historically oriented questions still continue to fascinate wider circles than members of religious communities.

According to Michael Legaspi, critical biblical studies have not only provided historical information but have also promoted values such as tolerance, reasonableness, and self-awareness as "social and moral by-products." Legaspi asks, however, whether these values are able to move people and motivate them in the way traditional biblical values – love, hope, and faith – do: "academic criticism tempers belief, while scriptural reading edifies and directs it."[35] Legaspi is certainly right in highlighting the ethical dimension of critical biblical scholarship, but the recent historical and political developments suggest that tolerance, reasonableness, and self-awareness are among the top take-aways academia can offer to various religious communities and the rest of society, not merely by-products. The rise of various openly anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, often drawing from quasi-Christian apocalyptic traditions, together with the growing appeal of antiscientific ideologies means that the task of critical academic study in producing measured and impartial knowledge of the formation of religious groups and ideologies is more urgent than ever. In this historical and societal context, academic critical research can redeem its relevance in society when it seeks to

[32] Jorunn Økland, "The Power of Canonised Motifs: The Chance for Biblical Studies in a Secular, Canonically Illiterate World," in *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating 25 Years of Brill's Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew, BibInt 161 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 216–39.

[33] Økland, "Power of Canonised Motifs," 235.

[34] Dunderberg, *Gnostic Morality Revisited*, 189.

[35] Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 169.

refute uncritical historizing, to relativize biblicist or antibiblicist claims to the truth or untruth of the biblical text, to point out the potential exploitation of scholarship as continuation of politics and to assess critically the significance (or lack thereof) of the matter at issue for contemporary concerns.[36]

Heikki Räisänen applauded the potential of nondenominational religious studies to enhance a self-critical attitude among adherents of different religious traditions, believing that this could pave the way for interreligious dialogue. Räisänen remained skeptical, however, about the possibility of any large-scale breakthrough in interreligious relations because "such a self-critical dialogue will remain the task of minorities which some might call 'elitist.'"[37] In the light of most recent historical and societal developments this may be too pessimistic. In recent years, the formidable speed of advancing globalization has brought people from different cultural backgrounds closer together than perhaps ever before. This has greatly increased the need for dispassionate information about various religions. The growing immigration of war victims from the Middle East to Europe and North America in particular has created additional demand for information which can facilitate encounters between all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The possibility can be entertained that, in the future, a larger section of the readership of early Christian studies may consist of members of other religious traditions who desire tools for interreligious dialogue in a changing environment.

Various academic institutions have responded to these recent developments. Faculties and departments that have traditionally been focused on Judaism and Christianity have included programs and courses on Islamic theology. For example, at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, the goal of the new multidisciplinary study track on Islamic theology "is a multidimensional and integrated understanding of Islam through sacred texts and in the everyday lives of Muslims."[38] Räisänen was no longer with us to witness this development in his home faculty, but he would no doubt have welcomed it. Such new learning environments create spaces for students from different backgrounds to study their own and other religious traditions in a critical but constructive atmosphere and give scholars new opportunities for cooperation across disparate fields of academic study. The questioning of often artificial disciplinary boundaries can facilitate exchanges of methodological innovations and make it easier to draw comparisons and recognize continuities and changes across various historical

[36] Martti Nissinen, "Reflections on the 'Historical-Critical' Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, SBLRBS 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 484.

[37] Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 304.

[38] See "Islamilainen teologia / Islamic Theology," University of Helsinki, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/islamictheology (accessed April 12, 2022).

periods and between different religious traditions. The study of similar themes and developments in the formation of religious traditions and identities may help to unravel absolute claims of superiority and reveal the shared human nature of many religious traditions.[39]

The institutional co-operation between scholars of Christianity, Judaism and Islam offers a platform to disseminate the results of academic study among communities representing different religious traditions. Through this co-operation, scholarship may have a long-term effect that supports communities and individuals in spiritual growth and education based on state-of-the-art critical research. In this way, academic study of religion can contribute to the development of more diverse and fair societies. We can only hope that the future proves that Räisänen was wrong in his pessimistic assessment that truly critical interreligious dialogue remains only "a dialogue between minorities."

In her article "Category Conflation: History and Theology in New Testament Studies," Adele Reinhartz takes her cue from Räisänen's argument that scholars should not confuse history and theology but treat the New Testament and early Christian texts first and foremost within their own historical, social, political, religious, and geographical contexts. Reinhartz argues that theological statements are still often masked as history, offering examples from studies on Paul (N. T. Wright, John Barclay, Daniel Boyarin), Jesus (Wright) and the Gospel of John (Ruben Zimmermann, Jan van der Watt, Boyarin). Reinhartz does not shy away from talking about her own background and experiences as a Jewish New Testament scholar. Heikki Räisänen would most certainly have welcomed Reinhartz's conclusion that theology and faith commitment can be deepened by historical research when scholars do not ignore or rationalize theologically or ethically problematic biblical passages but are ready to wrestle with them.

In his article "Revolution Masked as Tradition: Claims for Historical Continuity and Social Identity in Early Christianity and in the Ancient World," Raimo Hakola situates early Christian struggles between new interpretations and continuity in the larger ancient context, where various communities sought to preserve their cultural, social, and religious heritage while simultaneously introducing novel ways to express their distinctive social identities. Hakola argues that the tension between continuity and discontinuity, so aptly perceived by Heikki Räisänen in many of his publications, illustrates how various groups turn to the past to construct and maintain their social identities. Hakola applies the *social identity approach* to explain how the success of various cultural and social innovations depends on the ability of their architects to conceal that these reforms

[39] Cf. Ilkka Lindstedt, Nina Nikki, and Riikka Tuori, "Introduction," in *Religious Identities in Antiquity and Early Middle Ages: Walking Together and Parting Ways*, ed. Ilkka Lindstedt, Nina Nikki, and Riikka Tuori, Studies on the Children of Abraham 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 1–15.

are a mixture of various past and contemporary stimuli and as such continually in the making.

Petri Luomanen's article "Beliefs and the Rise of Christianity: Changing Paradigms in the Study of Early Christianity" reviews Räisänen's scholarly career and situates his research in the context of changing paradigms in the study of early Christianity. Luomanen shows how Räisänen adopted some central concepts from such social-scientific approaches as sociology of knowledge and social identity theory, incorporating them into his historical-critical research. While new approaches are often represented as challenging or even replacing traditional exegetical methods, Räisänen became a model for his younger colleagues in Helsinki on how to combine various methodical approaches. Luomanen also presents his own hermeneutical model that has the potential to serve as a theoretical framework for actualizing biblical interpretations. Luomanen visualizes this hermeneutics of commonality with the metaphor of the Christian church as a tent with four corners – doctrinal, ethical, ritual and narrative. Biblical studies applying a variety of methodological approaches can remain relevant for discussions in all four of these corners.

Niko Huttunen introduces Räisänen's role in Finnish society and the Evangelical-Lutheran church, less known to the international academic community. In his article "Meanwhile, at Home: Heikki Räisänen in the Finnish Publicity," Huttunen describes Räisänen's tensions with the church leaders that gained much media attention from the 1970s onward. His opponents labelled him as an ideologically secularized person with a mission against the church who personified the harmful effects of critical study of the Bible. Räisänen refused to bow to public pressure to give up his ecclesiastical position, remaining an ordained pastor in the Lutheran church until his death. It may come as a surprise to some among Räisänen's international audience that he was actively involved in the church, for example, in developing bibliodrama. Huttunen draws extensively on Räisänen's memoirs (published in Finnish) where Räisänen identifies himself as a cultural Christian who wants to hold on to his Christian heritage but does not interpret this heritage in narrowly dogmatic terms.

3. Diversity and Plurality in Paul's Thought

The third section of this volume continues the discussion that has been ongoing in Pauline studies since the publication of Räisänen's *Paul and the Law* (2nd ed. 1987). In this book, Räisänen argued that Paul's relationship to the Jewish law is ambiguous, and Paul seems to present somewhat conflicting statements regarding the law. The chapters in this section address the diversity and plurality in Paul's ideas about the status of Israel and his concept of salvation, topics that are still debated by scholars representing the so-called "New Perspective"

on Paul. The section includes a discussion of various methodological caveats in the study of the historical Paul.

Until the latter half of the 20th century, Judaism was viewed by scholars of Christianity as legalistic, and bereft of love and mercy.[40] This image was partly based on the polemics contained in New Testament texts, but it also reflected the later need to present Christianity as a superior alternative to Judaism. The problem was that ancient texts were not read in their original contexts and with an eye to their rhetorical conventions.

It was finally E. P. Sanders's trailblazing work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977),[41] which changed the study of early Christianity and Judaism for good. Sanders went to the relevant sources, analyzing Jewish texts from 200 BCE to 200 CE. He concluded that the existing scholarly image of Judaism was an unfounded caricature. Instead, the pattern of Judaism consisted of "getting in" the covenant by God's choice and "staying in" through the person's observance of the Law. Importantly, the Law contained means of atoning for transgressions and did not represent a way to "earn" one's position in the covenant.[42]

Sanders's view of Judaism was soon adopted by James D. G. Dunn who integrated it into his somewhat different understanding of Paul's relationship to Judaism. In his 1983 article, Dunn criticized Sanders's view of Paul as differing radically from the Jewish pattern of religion and stressed continuity instead.[43] For Dunn, Paul's problem with Judaism had to do with identity markers (or badges) such as circumcision and food regulations that set Jews apart from Gentiles. The title of Dunn's article, "The New Perspective on Paul," also gave the name to this paradigm shift that rejected the "old perspective" based on the caricature of legalistic Judaism.

Heikki Räisänen was actively engaged with Paul at the same time. He described his encounter with Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in the following manner: "I had been groping in the same direction for quite some time without knowing too well just where I was or what the goal might be; the publication of Sanders's illuminating work was like a gift from heaven for my own quest."[44] Räisänen and Sanders engaged in "a fruitful correspondence" as they wrote their

[40] For example, Ferdinand Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1880); Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903); Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886–1890). For a research history, see Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[41] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison on Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

[42] Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 422–23, 624–25; *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 45.

[43] James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983): 97.

[44] Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 2nd ed., WUNT 29 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), v.

important works, Räisänen his *Paul and the Law* (1983, 2nd edition 1987) and Sanders his *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (1983).[45] Sanders read and commented on parts of Räisänen's manuscript, and Räisänen was able to make use of Sanders's work in his footnotes.[46]

Räisänen agreed with Sanders on the character of Judaism at the turn of the Common Era and, unlike Dunn, also on Paul's discontinuity with it. Räisänen's Paul "rejected large parts of the law," which amounted to abolition of a divine institution.[47] Räisänen's *Paul and the Law* focused on Paul's argumentation concerning the Mosaic law, deciding that his reasoning was often internally inconsistent. Räisänen's Paul is caught in "conflicting convictions" trying "to do justice both to his tradition and to his new experience 'in Christ.'"[48] Räisänen later claimed that the question of possible contradictions in Paul's thought has become a watershed between theological and historical approaches to Paul because many who refuse to admit that Paul was inconsistent do so because of religious anxiety.[49]

Sanders's groundbreaking work later sparked another approach to understanding Paul, one that emphasized continuity between Paul and Judaism even more than Dunn did. The proponents of this "Radical New Perspective" or "Paul within Judaism"[50] school stress, with somewhat varying details, that Paul was Torah-observant his whole life. When Paul speaks negatively about the law, he is only addressing gentile believers, who in his opinion should be exempt from the law.[51]

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[45] Sanders's work with Paul did not stop here. His latest publication on the topic is a comprehensive monograph *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

[46] Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, v.

[47] Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 265.

[48] Räisänen, *Rise*, 257 following the course outlined in Paul and the Law.

[49] Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 83–86.

[50] The term "Paul within Judaism" is favored in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Mark D. Nanos (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). The term "Radical New Perspective" is used, e. g., by Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 66, 250. Other important contributions promoting this view include Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); J. Brian Tucker, *Remain in Your Calling: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011); *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space-Between*, LNTS 456 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[51] Cf. Magnus Zetterholm, "Paul Within Judaism: The State of the Questions" in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Mark D. Nanos (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 45. According to Zetterholm, Lloyd Gaston (e. g., *Paul and the Torah*, Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1987) originally "provided

An important contribution to this position is the 2015 collection of articles *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, edited by Mark Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm. In his article concerning the *status questionis* of Pauline scholarship, Zetterholm objects to normative and theological dispositions, stressing the need for "methodological atheism."[52] This is in line with Räisänen's program that promoted non-confessional neutrality and non-partisan fairness in the study of early Christianity. However, Räisänen came up with a very different overall conclusion in his interpretation of Paul and his relation to the law. This shows that the historical solution to Paul's Jewishness suggested by Zetterholm is not the inevitable result that follows when a Christian theological mindset is abandoned. Rather, it is but one possible scenario, which is open to debate.

There are, in fact, several problems with the "Paul within Judaism" approach which do not arise from a theologically slanted perspective. One of its main assumptions is that Paul shared with his contemporary Jews the expectation of gentiles pilgrimaging to Jerusalem in the end times – as gentiles, without adopting the Torah. In his invited, critical look at the articles in Zetterholm's and Nanos's collection, Terence Donaldson questions the popularity of this belief in the contemporary sources and indeed the compatibility of Jewish restoration theology with Paul's argument concerning the relationship between Jews and gentiles.[53] Furthermore, Donaldson does not see how a Jewish restoration framework would allow or explain Paul's insistence on gentiles being identified as progeny of Abraham.[54] Räisänen also expressed skepticism concerning this "new Paul," noting that its arguments often result in strained exegesis.[55]

Räisänen's criticism of the Paul within Judaism perspective is rehearsed and joined by Nina Nikki in her article "Challenges in the Study of the Historical Paul," which deals with the various problems scholars face in reconstructing a credible image of the historical Paul. The article discusses such matters as the deeply problematic role of Acts in reconstructing history and the ideological bias of many historical as well as current interpretations of Paul. In concert with Heikki Räisänen's program, Nikki emphasizes that the study of the historical Paul must not attempt to circumvent problematic features such as evidence

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an important piece of the puzzle by suggesting that Paul addressed non-Jews exclusively and thus never discussed how Jews should relate to the Torah."

[52] Zetterholm "State of the Questions," 31–32.

[53] Terence L. Donaldson "Paul within Judaism: A Critical Evaluation from a 'New Perspective' Perspective," in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Magnus Zetterholm and Mark D. Nanos (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 285–92.

[54] Donaldson, "Critical Evaluation," 293–98.

[55] Räisänen, calls them "tortuous" (Rise, 258) and exegetically twisted ("Interpreting Paul," in *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays, 1991–2001*, BibInt 59 [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 94).

of animosity or discontinuity of thought. Instead, she introduces the social psychological *social identity approach* as an effective tool for investigating some of Paul's inconsistent statements in the light of universal human cognition and (group) behavior.

In his article "Paul and Israel in Galatians," Christopher Tuckett delves into the question of the status of Israel in Paul's thought, claiming that there is a number of different perspectives within "the" New Perspective, and that this is clearly seen in widely differing views about the status of Israel in Paul's thought. The variation is particularly apparent in studies of Galatians, where the so-called "covenantal" and "apocalyptic" interpretations of the letter have vied with each other for some time, with no clear resolution to the debate. Tuckett discusses Israel in Galatians, seeking to determine how Paul views the status of Israel in this letter and, hence, whether Galatians and Romans represent radically different viewpoints. He concludes that Paul shows a similar ambivalence toward the issue in Galatians as has also been detected in Romans.

In their article "Unity and Plurality in Paul's Concepts of Salvations: The Theological Development of Paul in the Mirror of the Letter to the Romans," Gerd Theissen and Petra von Gemünden participate in Heikki Räisänen's sensitivity for plurality and contradictions in New Testament writings by presenting a study of Paul's different concepts of salvation in Romans. While Räisänen claimed Paul differentiated between three concepts of salvation in the letter, Theissen and von Gemünden broaden this to four concepts: (1) salvation by works, (2) by justification, (3) by transformation, and (4) by election. They suggest these four concepts structure the letter to the Romans (Rom 1:18–3:20; 3:21–5:21; 6–8; 9–11) and form a mirror of the biographical development of Paul. In their reconstruction, Paul started as a diaspora Jew with a concept of salvation by works that surpass all gentile ethos, and his concept of justification originated in his conversion – a view that runs counter to what Räisänen claimed. Theissen and von Gemünden further argue that the idea of transformation was developed in the context of Paul's mission to the gentiles and became manifest in the conflict in Antioch. Paul activated the idea of salvation by election when he was going to Jerusalem in order to expand salvation to the whole of Israel. With the paraenesis in Rom 12–15, he is coping with his future challenges – in both the Roman congregation and Jerusalem.

4. Early Christian Beliefs in History: Reception and Transitions

Heikki Räisänen was primarily a historical critic but he was also open to hermeneutical questions. The last section of this volume reflects his interests in biblical reception history. The diversity that Räisänen perceived as characteristic of the rise of early Christian beliefs also characterizes the reception of biblical texts.

What effect has the Bible had in history? This was the question Räisänen undertook in his programmatic article titled "The 'Effective History' of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship."[56] Räisänen was inspired by the work of Ulrich Luz, who had introduced the concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to biblical studies in the first part of his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.[57] Luz made a distinction between the history of interpretation (*Auslegungsgeschichte*) in commentaries and other theological writings and the effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), that is, the reception and actualization of biblical texts in other media, such as sermons, canon law, hymns, ecclesial art, etc.[58] Räisänen, however, was not happy with drawing the line between different media. Instead, he distinguished between the "effectiveness" of a text on the one hand and reception (or appropriation) of a text "as does not let it be effective."[59]

In line with his overall program, Räisänen was not satisfied with Luz's understanding of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as confined to the church but called for a broader perspective; what kinds of effects the Bible has had on "customs, legislation, politics, culture at large."[60] One of his key arguments was that several biblical texts have no effect at all; there are numerous passages, and even entire writings that have not been widely used, either in the past or at present. On the other hand, there are "biblical" traditions with a strong influence even though they do not appear in any of the canonical writings, such as Peter's death by being crucified upside down or the number and names of the magi who visit the newborn Jesus.

Räisänen insisted that the effects of the Bible can also be (and have often been) harmful: "the fruits of Scripture have been both salutary and detrimental."[61] In many of his later studies, he focused on "the dark side" of biblical texts, such as violence in the Book of Revelation or the threats of hell in the Gospel of Matthew whose "impact … on ordinary recipients of the gospel message has been disastrous."[62] Tracing the reception of such texts involved for him an ethical-critical

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[56] The article, based on a talk Räisänen gave in 1990, was published in *SJT* 45 (1992): 303–24. It appeared in a reprinted version in Räisänen's collected essays *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 263–82.

[57] Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, Teilband 1: Mt 1–7,* EKK 1/1 (Zürich: Benzinger, 1985). The commentary was translated into English in 1989. A completely revised second edition appeared in 2002, and in English in 2007. The later parts were first published in 1990 (EKK 1/2, Mt 8–17), 1997 (EKK 1/3, Mt 18–25), and 2002 (EKK 1/4, Mt 26–28).

[58] Luz, *Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 78.

[59] Räisänen, "'Effective History' of the Bible," 269–70.

[60] Räisänen, "'Effective History' of the Bible," 271.

[61] Räisänen, "'Effective History' of the Bible," 280. Later on, Luz also emphasized that reception historical studies must present both "good and bad receptions." See Ulrich Luz, "The Contribution of Reception History to a Theology of the New Testament" in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honour of Robert Morgan*, ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 132.

[62] Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*, 6. See, e. g., his "Matthäus und die Hölle: Von Wirkungsgeschichte zur ethischen Kritik," in *Die prägende Kraft der Texte: Hermeneutik und Wirkungsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments; Ein Symposium zu Ehren von Ulrich Luz*, ed. Moisés May-

perspective. This was in line with his overall demand to resist both theologizing tendencies in biblical interpretation and defending one's own tradition at the cost of others.

Räisänen admitted that drawing a line between the effects of the Bible and the use of the Bible was difficult and open to debate.[63] In the light of more recent reception historical studies, it is indeed impossible to maintain this division. Räisänen identified tracing the effects of the Bible as a theological enterprise that belonged to the second actualizing stage of the biblical scholar's work. He wanted to question the harmonious assimilation of the effective history of the Bible into the "normative ecclesial-dogmatic tradition" of the churches.[64] The expanding of the field of biblical scholarship to include a variety of interdisciplinary approaches means that this struggle between history and theology, so characteristic of Räisänen's scholarship, has lost most of its force.

In recent years, the field of biblical reception studies has rapidly expanded with the emergence of several journals, book series, commentaries, handbooks, and reference works.[65] The breadth of material and the wide range of perspectives demonstrate that it is impossible to speak of reception history as a method. Rather, Bible reception is a discursive space where the Bible, biblical texts, themes, and characters are situated in various historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. This diversity also presents itself in the terminology used. While "reception history" is the most commonly used name, some scholars prefer to use other terms, such as "reception criticism," "reception theory," "cultural history," "cultural impact of the Bible," or the like.[66] For some, the focus in reception studies is archival, the main task being to collect traces of biblical texts and themes in religious traditions or other cultural or political settings. For others, the main task is theoretical, since they seek to explain what kinds of reader responses biblical texts can generate.[67] Yet others emphasize that the Bible is a

ordomo, SBS 199 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005), 103–24; "Revelation, Violence, and War: Glimpses of a Dark Side," in *The Way the World Ends? The Apocalypse of John in Culture and Ideology*, ed. John Lyons and Jorunn Økland, The Bible in the Modern World 19 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 151–65 (reprinted as chapters 8 and 11 in Räisänen, *Bible among Scriptures*).

[63] Räisänen, "'Effective History' of the Bible," 270.

[64] Räisänen, "'Effective History' of the Bible," 265–66.

[65] Some examples include the journals *Biblical Interpretation* (Brill) and *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* (de Gruyter), the *Blackwell Bible Commentaries* series, the *Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception* (Oxford University Press), and the book series *Studies of the Bible and Its Reception* and *Handbooks of the Bible and Its Reception*, published by de Gruyter in tandem with their *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*.

[66] See Emma England and William John Lyons, "Explorations in the Reception of the Bible," in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Emma England and William John Lyons, LHBOTS 615 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 3–13.

[67] James E. Harding, "What Is Reception History, and What Happens to You if You Do It?" in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Emma England and William John Lyons, LHBOTS 615 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 39–40.

cultural product and biblical reception is embedded in wider cultural history.[68] This last approach is a helpful reminder that studies of biblical reception must not be isolated from reception studies in other fields in the humanities or from the broader field of academic religious studies.

The focus on reception displays the complexities of the meaning making of biblical texts. Whereas biblical scholarship has traditionally aimed at delineating the original meaning of a given text in its historical context, more recently this aim has become open to debate.[69] The starting point in most reception historical studies is, in line with Hans Robert Jauß's "reception aesthetics" (*Rezeptionsästhetik*), that the meaning of a text is produced in the synergic relationship between the text and the reader.[70] For example, the question of whether a given biblical text is anti-Judaistic or not is not only dependent on the author and the situation in which the text was written, but also on the ways the text has been interpreted and used.[71]

Biblical reception history has the potential to dismantle the dichotomy between historical and literary approaches to the Bible, which has characterized biblical studies in recent decades. With its orientation to reconstructing the history of interpretations it shares an interest with other historical research and, with its emphasis on the engagement of the reader in the interpretative process, it resembles literary approaches. This mediation between viewpoints also shows that the dichotomy between research and interpretation – or exegesis and hermeneutics – on which Räisänen still operated, is too clear-cut. Reception studies maintain that scholarly readings of the Bible are not outside of the sphere of reception.[72] In the words of Ulrich Luz, "neither history nor texts of the past are simply objects of research: rather, they belong to the stream of history which also carries the boat of the interpreter."[73] Admitting this does not mean that one interpretation is as good as another or that a scholarly analysis is just one opinion among others. Interpretations can be farfetched, unreasonable, and even harmful. The scholarly community has the advantage their expertise brings in making sense of the biblical text – and they should use their competence. A crucial part of this expertise is the awareness of the cultural, ethnic, geographical, historical, and other features that affect the way one reads and understands the text.

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[68] Timothy Beal, "Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures," *BibInt* 19 (2011): 357–72; Colleen M. Conway, *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael: A Cultural History of a Biblical Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3–5.

[69] See the discussion in Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*, ISBL (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

[70] Beal, "Reception History and Beyond," 361–64.

[71] Hakola, "Anti-Judaism," 28.

[72] Harding, "What is Reception History," 41.

[73] Luz, "Contribution of Reception History," 125.

The growth of reception studies exemplifies how the biblical studies field at present looks very different from what it did in the past. New generations ask new questions and apply new approaches to ancient texts, inspired by the continuous changes in the cultural, societal, and geographical environments where scholars work. For example, it took generations before women were recognized as actors in the history of early Christianity. The first steps in this direction were taken in dialogue with the struggle for women's political rights at the end of the 19th century and new, more systematic interest was motivated by the broader women's rights movement from the 1960s onward. Today, questions pertaining to women and their roles in early Judaism and Christianity have become established. In her essay, "Functions and Offices in Ancient Christian Communities: For Men Only?," Adela Yarbro Collins examines the terminology used for authoritative positions in Paul's letters and other early Christian sources. She argues that women in ancient Christian communities ministered in a variety of functions, including the role of apostle, which was for Paul the most authoritative form of activity in the service of God. Furthermore, the condemnations and prohibitions of the ministry of women by early Christian male leaders in fact testify to the existence of the very practices they attempt to suppress. Finally, the surviving inscriptions provide confirmation that these practices were approved and recognized by some male leaders and by the communities these women ministered to.

Halvor Moxnes deals explicitly with the question of how the social and cultural context influences scholars of early Christian history. The aim of his essay "Early Christian Communities as Associations: Tracing the Nineteenth-Century Roots of a Social Model" is to discern the beginnings of the use of associations as a model for presentations of early Christian groups – a model widely used in recent scholarship for understanding early Christian communities. The traces lead him to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany and England, in which voluntary associations increased exponentially. This indicated the growth of the bourgeoisie and its desire to find a place of influence in a society that was in a transition from autocratic monarchic rule towards broader political participation. It was this experience, Moxnes claims, that New Testament scholars used when they described early Christian groups as associations (German: *Vereine*), which played a role within Greco-Roman societies.

The starting point of Ilkka Lindstedt's essay "Religious Groups in the Qur'an" is a dialogue with Räisänen's early qur'anic studies in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, it was still generally thought that the life of the Prophet Muḥammad was fairly well known and that Islam emerged as a separate religion in the time of the Prophet. More recent research has contested both these suggestions. Lindstedt considers the various categories and groupings mentioned in the Qur'an from the perspective of social identity. He states that the Qur'an does not yet evince distinctively Islamic identity but uses the term "Believers" for the ingroup. The

remarks on the "People of the Book" are ambivalent; some verses point toward widespread agreement between them and the "Believers," while others are highly critical of them. This ambivalence points to the fact that the People of the Book constitute a boundary category in which some are "in," while others are "out." This indicates that social identifications were often more dynamic and negotiable than the tendency towards stable categories suggests. Lindstedt's discussion exemplifies how interdisciplinary methodologies, like the social identity approach, help to recognize parallel developments in the formation of religious traditions.

The volume ends with an epilogue, written by Heikki Räisänen's long-time colleague Risto Uro, in which he reflects on Räisänen's impact on his personal development as a researcher. Räisänen's call to study early Christianity from a strictly history of religions perspective inspired Uro to apply insights from cultural anthropology in his scholarship. While cultural anthropology emphasizes the difference between the contemporary and ancient worlds, Uro later turned to cognitive science of religion which focuses on the universal architecture of human cognition, thus bridging the gap between the past and the present. Encouraged by these advances, Uro sought to supplement Räisänen's focus on the thought-world of early Christians with the multidisciplinary perspective of ritual studies, which pays attention both to the social and ideological aspects of early Christianity. In a more recent development, Uro discusses how Räisänen's unapologetic reading of the Bible and his call for ethical hermeutics in "the global village" might translate into environmentally sustainable biblical scholarship in the current ecological crisis. Uro thus demonstrates that in order to remain relevant, academic study of the Bible must be willing to stay open to change and renewal in the face of global challenges.

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