

Mark Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: the clarity of Scripture* (IVP, 2006)

The relative impotence of the church in New Zealand society is attributed to many things. Most commonly we hear talk about ineffective leadership. While leadership is important, it is not *that* important. The cause may lie more significantly with our impoverished convictions about the gospel and the Word of God. For all the vitality that the generation of charismatic renewal brought into the church, its advocacy of that needed renewal in attitudes towards the Word of God left much to be desired. Oh, we ~~talked~~ talked the talk about a high view of scripture . but the convictions were more theoretical than practical. Where was the evidence in the life and worship and witness of the local church? Relatively rare, it must be said.

So with this ~~kiwi~~ kiwi-made preaching initiative resources which strengthen our convictions about the Word are to the fore. Although this book is not for the beginner, it is a little beauty. It needs our engagement as preachers. In it Thompson makes a case for the clarity of scripture, by which he means ~~that~~ that quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith+(169-170).

After considering the traditional objections to the doctrine, the author wades into some very lucid analysis of the impact of the postmodern context on this doctrine - firstly from pp30-47 and then again from pp111-132. If you want to see Gadamer, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Ricoeur, Fish, Eco and the like all appear in the space of a few pages, here is your opportunity. Really helpful.

Then it is a case of commending the doctrine of the clarity of scripture to readers. It is important because ~~neglect~~ neglect or dismissal of the clarity of Scripture almost inevitably undermines all talk of the authority of Scripture+(46). To build this commendation Thompson makes a case for God, as ~~the~~ the effective communicator+, being the one guarantees scriptural clarity. God spoke and expected to be understood. In both testaments, ~~there~~ there is an eradicable verbal element to God's dealings with his people ... which is not at all diminished by the personal reality of the incarnation. Personal presence does not do away with the need for words+(63). From here Thompson explores the biblical passages which speak of this clarity of Scripture. After all it is one thing to bring a doctrine *to* the Scriptures, it is quite another to find it *in* the Scriptures. The way Jesus and the apostles handle the Old Testament is followed by a discussion of ~~the~~ the classic texts+on clarity in the Old Testament: Deut 30, Psalm 119, 2 Kings 22, Nehemiah 8, Isaiah 55 . before considering a case for ~~clarity~~ clarity hard won+and those times when Scripture acknowledges its own difficulty. For example, the parables (Mark 4), the Ethiopian (Acts 8), and 2 Peter 3.14-16. ~~Understanding~~ Understanding is not always automatic or simple. There remains room for explanation and application+(110).

The author does not run from trouble! In Chapter 4 we find him ~~engaging~~ engaging the Hermeneutical Challenge+(111-141). He deals with the rise of the reader and the decline of the author in hermeneutics. ~~Understanding~~ Understanding has been gradually transformed into overstanding (117) ... the reader effectively supplants the author and plays havoc with the text (128).+For Thompson, grave though they appear, ~~the~~ the challenges posed to the doctrine of Scripture's clarity by contemporary theories of reading are nowhere near as serious as may first appear+(140). The issues at stake are theological long before they are either historical or literary.

~~God~~ God has something to say and he is very good at saying it+(170, the final sentence).

Paul Windsor