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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

ON LETTING A TEXT 'ACT LIKE A MAN' THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE: NEW HORIZONS FOR CANONICAL READING, WITH HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTIONS

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[*Editor's note:* An earlier version of this article was delivered as the Rutherford House 21st Anniversary Lecture in St Andrew's and St George's Church, Edinburgh, on Thursday 24th June 2004. This article is part of a larger project and will appear as a chapter in a forthcoming book entitled *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: The Twelve and Isaiah in Canonical Introduction*, in the new series, *Studies in Theological Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew, Joel Green, and Christopher R. Seitz and published by Baker Academic.]

The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in the company of the author.¹

[I]f contemporary readers wish to understand the prophets, they must entirely forget that the writings were collected in a sacred book centuries after the prophets wrote. The contemporary reader must not read their words as portions of the Bible but must attempt to place them in the context of the life of the people of Israel in which they were first spoken.²

In these quotations we see a separation of text and author, and a valorizing of man over text. In this paper I want to reverse that trend, and so the strange title, 'On letting a text "act like a man"'.

¹ Benjamin Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', *Essays and Reviews* (London, 1860), p. 384.

² H. Gunkel, *Prophecy in Israel: Search for Identity* (London, 1987), p. 24.

G. A. SMITH AND EXPERIENTIAL-EXPRESSIVE READING

Some years back, Klaus Baltzer, then Professor of Old Testament at the University of Munich, gave a public lecture at Yale on the Bible-Babel debate and its correlate, as he saw it, in the United States, in the famous Snopes Trial in Arkansas. The context was so familiar and so unique to us culturally as Americans, that it was difficult to think that a German professor from a different context might shed any light on things.

I want to begin my talk on the Minor Prophets with reference to George Adam Smith and do so with caution, for the same reasons Baltzer might well have paused as he looked in on an American culture not his own. For biblical students of a previous generation, I imagine Smith's name stirs up various kinds of memories, and evokes larger vistas than a simple citation from his work will convey. Yet in a way his work on the Minor Prophets, for all its cultural impact in this country, was also representative of a kind of reading of the Bible which held sway throughout the beginning and middle parts of the twentieth century.³ He put his own distinctive signature on this of course, and one can catch in the printed version what sitting in the classroom and listening to him must have been like.

For all that, I have my own version of this same kind of experience, and can recall it as though it were yesterday: lectures on Amos and Hosea and Micah and the prophets of Israel from my undergraduate days. I can see the lecturer mount the stage and begin an indictment of the nations, depicting at the same time the joy of the Israelites as their enemies were condemned, 'for three transgressions, yea for four'. And then the hammer came down, first on Judah and then, with real crescendo, on Israel.

Dr Bernhard Boyd, who gave those lectures, was also a sought-after preacher in the Presbyterian Church, and in fact, he died in the pulpit, in Charlotte, NC, having just completed a sermon worthy of Amos and of his university lectures on the prophets. (It is hard to match that for crescendo effect.)

The point is, this kind of approach to the prophets had a natural extension into the preaching life of the church that would be hard to fault. Listen to just a few lines from Smith, and you will sense that an alliance had been struck between rhetorical exposure of the force of the prophet's word and the deployment of a similar manner of speaking on behalf of the Christian gospel:

³ George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (rev. ed.; New York and London, 1928).

Amos was not a citizen of the Northern Kingdom, to which he almost exclusively refers; but it was because he went up and down in it, using those eyes which the desert air had sharpened, that he so thoroughly learned the wickedness of the people, the corruption of Israel's life in every rank and class of society (p. 78).

or

We read of no formal process of consecration for this first of the prophets. Through his clear desert air, the word of God breaks upon him without medium or sacrament (p. 79).

Two things stand out here. First is *the sense of discovering the very beginnings of a thing*: the taproot of the majestic tree of prophecy. For all the necessary preliminary attention to the 'pre-literary prophets', the power of Amos is the power of laying bare the ground floor of a phenomenon, that is, prophecy as it will unfold in the canonical presentation of the Three and the Twelve, the Major and Minor Prophets, the *Nebi'im*. Amos is signal: 'this first of the prophets' (p. 79).

And the second feature of Smith's treatment is his *simple capacity to identify with the world in which Amos lived*. This would in time prove a fragile thing. In Blenkinsopp's recent treatment,⁴ the rural shepherd and his clean desert air become something of the order of Ben Cartwright and agribusiness in the TV series 'Bonanza' (p. 79: 'an official of some kind in the kingdom of Samaria... which does not warrant the image of an uneducated rustic visionary'). This is what happens when the social world of the prophets is brought into ever greater – so it is hoped – precision. But we can set even this cavil to the side when we hear the rhetorical potential come rushing at us when one gets alongside the man Amos. For all the problems of historical-critical reading, it provided a fresh look at a corpus of minor prophets which, especially in the case of Amos, made them indeed major – especially the newly freed Amos, who had languished under characterisations like that of Jerome: *imperitus sermone* [*Editor's note*: see Vulgate translation of 'rude in speech' in 2 Cor. 11:6, AV].

'For the English-speaking world', writes Brevard Childs, 'G. A. Smith's eloquent Victorian commentary on Amos played no small role in the new assessment of the prophet's true significance.'⁵ Not third in a canonical series (thought somehow to be an important measure of things) but the first prophet: signal, rhetorically charged, his eyes sharpened, and

⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, 1996).

⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 397.

so too in some measure our own by looking in on such a portrayal, by the 'clear desert air'.

George Lindbeck has classified this kind of reading of Scripture 'experiential-expressive', as over against two other types, 'cognitive-propositional' and 'cultural-linguistic.'⁶ The theological lineage of such a stance can be traced to Schleiermacher and Herder and Bishop Lowth.⁷ It understands the Bible to be a deposit of religious feelings and dispositions, which its narrative line, properly reconfigured, will surrender up under the tools of historical retrieval. On such an account, doctrines are not cognitive statements, 'informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities', to paraphrase Lindbeck's language, but are 'noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations'.⁸

In the case of Smith, the discursive dimension has not gone away entirely: Smith works with the prophet's own words in a fairly direct way. It is just that these now exist within an existential framework which drives the selection of texts to be discussed, the order in which they are discussed, and the strong 'feelings, attitudes or existential orientations' Smith is able to focus on, which mark the treatment he gives.

This is not the place to give a full account of Lindbeck's theory (see a compact analysis in Childs' excursus, footnote 8). If we had time, it would be easy to show how Smith's assumptions contrast with cognitive and cultural-linguistic approaches. To a certain extent, the experiential-expressive approach, shorn of its scientific claims for accuracy and historical facts, and now attached to reader-response, is what one sees in the many works of Walter Brueggemann. So its legacy lives on.

⁶ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, 1984).

⁷ See the treatment of Hans Frei, 'Herder on the Bible,' in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, 1974). He helpfully distinguishes Herder's and Lowth's treatments. A single quote from Herder shows the lineage of Smith, 'Become with shepherds a shepherd, with a people of the sod a man of the land, with the ancients of the Orient an Easterner, if you wish to relish these writings in the atmosphere of their origin' – no wonder Amos, shepherd *and* man of the sod, got such special treatment (from Frei's translation of Herder's *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend*, in *Eclipse*, p. 185).

⁸ These paraphrases are supplied in a trenchant analysis by Brevard S. Childs, in *The New Testament as Canon* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 542.

PROBLEMS

Those who adopted an experiential-expressive mode of reading did not all share the same historiographic confidence – or scepticism. But in some measure it is right to argue that they all share, as difficult as it may be for them to accept this, the same basic philosophical orientation.

I have indicated that this kind of approach had, in its day, considerable positive potential in connection with the life of the church and the preaching office, and that potential lives on and is a reality to be accepted and affirmed. But there was also a price to be paid.

First, such an approach ultimately had to face questions of authenticity. How much of the present book of Amos – its discursive reality – gave us access to the 'clear air of the desert' and the man Amos? It matters little that one can give minimal or maximal answers to this question, or that the kind of inquiry unleashed will have yet more dramatic effect in other parts of the canon, in Isaiah, for example. Smith had to wrestle with a text like Amos 9:8b – did it breathe the same desert air as 9:8a?⁹ This was not a technical question only, turning on consistent deployment of a critical method; one sees this more readily in Smith than in later treatments, which cover up the experiential dimension because it is now not so easy to come by as it was in Smith's mildly critical treatment. What was at stake was an accurate depiction, based upon an experiential account of the man Amos, of his views on Israel's restoration and the kind of theology – yes, doctrine – which must treat of the finality of God's sentences of judgement, both here and throughout the canon. A serious theological matter, and not just a literary-critical issue in the area of 'authenticity,' was at stake.

Second, it belongs to this kind of approach that the real Amos never stands still for long. Smith must make continuous revisions, up to his 1928 version.¹⁰ It belongs to the nature of the project that it be

⁹ In the section 'Voices of Another Dawn,' he asks, 'Can we believe the same prophet to have uttered at the same time these two statements? And is it possible to see in that prophet the hitherto unwavering, unqualifying Amos?' to which he replies, 'I confess I cannot so readily get over the rest of the book and its gloom; and I am the less inclined to be sure about these verses being Amos' own that it seems to have been not unusual for later generations, for whom the day-star was beginning to rise, to add their own inspired hopes to the unrelieved threats of their predecessors of the midnight' (pp. 201-2).

¹⁰ He writes, 'In the light of our clearer knowledge of Hebrew Metre I have thoroughly revised and recast my translations of the Prophets' own words and of the additions to them from later pious hands. I trust that such

speculative, because the final literary presentation cannot be judged final, but only an entry into a different and more decisive world of the man Amos. The inherent instability is a negative, seen from one side, but also a positive: it assures that 'scholars' will have something to do, permanently, be they strong positivists or sceptics who judge the Bible's capacity to render history virtually vacant – except for some very minimalist claim.

Third, such an approach severed the material witness, in its given form, from the subject matter, and made the canonical shape and order a land of potentiality only but not of final permanence.¹¹ And it did this not just in the case of individual prophetic books, but of the Bible as an entirety. I have a book on my shelf which I keep just within eye's view above my computer screen. *The Bible in Order* is its title.¹² It would be nice to be able to open that book and just have the Bible! But the title makes the point, and the point is not a local one only (in Amos). We will not all understand the same thing when we seek for and posit order, of course. But we will be saying that such an inquiry is important and valid.

That there is nothing simple about this kind of inquiry – a flight to premodern fundamentalism – needs to be underscored as well. The long history of interpretation is different from historical-criticism precisely because the larger question of order was taken seriously, and because *tota scriptura* meant that matters of interdependence and association were of necessity to be worked out. Steinmetz speaks of 'an endless deferral of

changes, bringing the results of Biblical Criticism down to this date, may continue the usefulness of a work, which during the last thirty-two years has maintained a wide circulation' (p. xv). Little could he have known about the inherent instability of the project upon which he had embarked.

¹¹ This point is made nicely in the quote at the heading of this essay: '[I]f contemporary readers wish to understand the prophets, they must entirely forget that the writings were collected in a sacred book centuries after the prophets wrote. The contemporary reader must not read their words as portions of the Bible but must attempt to place them in the context of the life of the people of Israel in which they were first spoken' (in H. Gunkel, *Prophecy in Israel: Search for Identity* [London, 1987], p. 24).

¹² Joseph Rhymer (ed.), *The Bible in Order* (Garden City, NY, 1975). The subtitle is especially instructive: 'All the writings which make up the Bible, arranged in their chronological order according to the dates at which they were written, or edited into the form in which we know them; seen against the history of the times, as the Bible provides it.' By 1975 this kind of project was admitting more complexity, as a distinction between the date of writing and editing was beginning to be registered as salient.

truth' which gets at the theological problematic,¹³ but there is a low-flying and messy historical correlate: the endless generation of separate prophets and truths and myths and authorial intentions and historical contexts and issues discretely handled without the need to bring them into a meaningful, inner-relationship.¹⁴

And lastly (one could go on at length) there is the price to be paid for attending to one basic level of intention: that said to attach itself to the prophet under scrutiny. This has sharp repercussions for our ability to treat an entire book – and not just parts of it – as an intentional speech-act. But it also means that one cannot adequately grasp how the Bible *relates to itself in its own system of cross-reference*. The technical language for this is intertextuality (or intratextuality) but the simple observation to be made is that, ultimately, it has to do with the way parts of the Bible and finally the Two Testaments themselves relate to one another. Failure to see this dimension at work within the Old Testament itself means that the way the New hears the Old and relates to it, cannot be properly assessed either – if one bothers at all in a treatment of Amos.

By focusing on historical retrieval of an author and his intentions,¹⁵ it is possible to lay bare a dimension of the Old Testament, which, in spite of its rhetorical potential, cannot be reattached to the way the New hears the Old.¹⁶ One will be forced to conclude that the New simply invents the stance it wants to take, given its theological concerns, over against the

¹³ David C. Steinmetz, 'The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,' *Theology Today* 37 (1980), pp. 27-38.

¹⁴ Hans Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, 1974).

¹⁵ 'Scripture has one meaning – the meaning it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it' – so Benjamin Jowett, 'On the Interpretation,' p. 378.

¹⁶ This was the modest point being made by Childs as far back as *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970). Whatever its limitations when extended to the level of Biblical Theology, it is a dimension that cannot be shut out – and most certainly not because historical-critical findings have obscured the intentionality heard by the New Testament. The fresh challenge raised in Childs' later works is, how does the Old Testament speak as Christian Scripture and as a vehicle of divine revelation? This cannot be exhausted by looking only at what the NT says about its plain sense, critical though this dimension is for theological reflection of its own kind. See now *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis, 1993). I have also commented on this matter in 'Christological Interpretation of Texts and Trinitarian Claims to Truth: An Engagement with Francis Watson's *Text and Truth*' *SJT* 52 (1999), pp. 209-26.

Old; or one will tortuously seek to show that the Old is making its way to the New by means other than direct intertextual reference, say, by tradition-historical movement.¹⁷ The alternative, to say the New is reading the Old according to intentions exposed by historical-critical method, is simply too far to climb out on a limb already stressed and threatening to break from the sheer weight of historicism.¹⁸

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE NEAR EXAMPLE OF E. B. PUSEY

It is fascinating to look at Pusey's commentary on the Minor Prophets in the light of today's interpretative struggles. Pusey treats the Twelve in order.¹⁹ Where there is one prophet using language from another ('the LORD roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem' in Amos and Joel), he believes the earlier book must be in circulation and therefore available for reference. He defends the inspired character in these instances of dependence as well as in the case of individual books as such. The Twelve are in historical order. This is as true for undated books and books now treated as late (Joel, Obadiah, Jonah) as well as for books which are in (critically) undisputed chronological order, so Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. This also means that Amos has to surrender what would become his place of privilege and give way to Hosea and Joel. Amos is literally dependent upon Joel. Books that are undated should seek their proper historical location by reference to their neighbours, a principle Pusey derives from Jerome, and he calls upon him for support in a way which will soon become an embarrassment as the mechanisms of historical objectivity are released.

Pusey does not engage in the kind of lengthy historical defence of the Twelve individual prophets which marks, say, his treatment of Daniel. We get a realistic portrayal of the prophets, tuned to their assumed historical location. The matter of order is accepted for what it is, and assessed when there are difficulties, on the grounds that what we have before us is as it should be. There is no 'real Amos' other than the one brokered by the

¹⁷ C. Seitz, 'Two Testaments and the Failure of One Tradition-History,' *Figured Out* (Louisville, 2001), pp. 35-47, and *Word Without End* (Grand Rapids, 1998), pp. 28-40.

¹⁸ See the very illuminating exchange stimulated by John Sailhamer in 'Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15' *WTJ* 63 (2001), pp. 87-96. The response by Enns and McCartney is: Dan McCartney and Peter Enns, 'Matthew and Hosea: A Response to John Sailhamer' *WTJ* 63 (2001), pp. 97-105.

¹⁹ E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets with a Commentary* (Oxford, Cambridge, and London, 1860).

text's discursive unfolding. The matter of authorial intention does not raise its head, because Pusey does not focus on the 'real Amos' but on the intentionality he assumes the book itself executes as it unfolds in its literary givenness. Where his approach is different to what preceded in much of the history of exegesis, is in his need to relate the individual parts under discussion to the whole story of the Bible. But this observation risks being far too simple, given the diversity in the history of interpretation itself, and given the constraints and format of the commentary as he undertook it.

A FRESH LOOK AT THE MINOR PROPHETS

At this point the selection of my area of focus might be causing you to wonder, 'Why a talk on issues facing Old Testament study using the example of the Minor Prophets?' Four brief answers before we look at the Book of the Twelve as an example of recent trends in exegesis and hermeneutics. My hope in so doing is to show that the turn from man to text, from recovered individual personality to the collective witness of the final-form presentation of the Twelve as a whole, need not rob the exposition of its rhetorical power nor its existential engagement with new generations of readers.

1. I have learned in our post-modern context not to assume anything in the classroom. My new pedagogical insight is 'make your best case first and bring the students along'. The books of the minor prophets are small, and more easily treated. My new rule is: take the parts of the Bible which best illustrate the smallest number of problems and challenges, and build on that to more difficult cases. Try to get students to consider contexts other than historically reconstructed ones. Much of my own work has been in Isaiah, and it is too ambitious a book to begin with. The students are like Augustine who, having been given Isaiah, returned and asked Ambrose for something simpler.

2. The Twelve are getting a lot of attention today. Or, I should say, the Twelve *is* getting a good deal of attention. The comparison with Isaiah is helpful. That book was pulled apart and made into three or more separate collections. The sense that something was lost in reading the book as a whole in time returned and captured the attention of the field. Renewed interest in the larger book meant a spate of publications and fresh approaches.²⁰ The Twelve is now a similar case.²¹ Why does it circulate as

²⁰ Isaiah has been the focus of more monographs and new commentary treatments than any other book of the Old Testament. This has all had to do

one book? How does one honour individual prophetic books but also a given organisation and sequence? The rabbis counted the words of the whole collection, and the earliest reference in Sirach speaks of the Twelve as a whole, and not as isolated men in a more accurate chronological order. How should we assess this? Interest in Isaiah has shifted to the Twelve, and indeed to the relationship between these two books as books, and the way the final form editing of one matches kindred moves in the other.²²

3. To speak of honouring a given sequence and organisation is also to question standard ways of operating. I was asked to write a textbook on the prophets. If reconstructing the history of prophecy was riddled with problems, why perpetuate these in the name of putting my own theory forward? Could it not be possible to treat the Twelve in their given order, without losing the better aspects of historical-critical insight into their individuality and historical setting? It simply seemed inconceivable to me that a perpetuation of the 'Amos to Hosea to Micah to First Isaiah to authentic Jeremiah to Zephaniah and on through the Three and the Twelve model' was justified.

4. At a seminar in St Andrews we have been looking at the main principles and exegetical concerns which animate the work with Scripture in the Early Church and in the history of interpretation before the rise of historical-critical questions.²³ The way in which matters like sequence (*akolouthia*), larger organisational coherence (*skopos, hypothesis*), and governing theological significance and constraint (*dianoia, theoria, regula fidei*) function to order and guide exegesis remain as relevant today as ever. Once one frees the material from having to make sense only against a backdrop of historical reconstruction and contextualisation, new challenges

with the breakdown in an older 'Three Isaiahs' model of interpretation. See for example, my essays on Isaiah in *Word Without End*.

²¹ A very helpful sample of new work can be found in J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney (eds), *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (Atlanta, 2000). I have my own treatment in I. Fischer, K. Schmid, H. G. M. Williamson (eds), *Prophetie in Israel* (Munster, 2003) in an essay entitled 'Prophecy and Tradition-History: The Achievement of Gerhard von Rad and Beyond' (*Word Without End*, pp. 29-52). See also now P. L. Redditt and A. Scharf (eds), *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 325; Berlin/New York, 2003).

²² O. H. Steck, *Der Abschluss der Prophetie im Alten Testament: Ein Versuch zur Frage der Vorgeschichte des Kanons* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1991).

²³ A provocative and engaging overview can be found in F. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 1997). I have a brief discussion of this in *Figured Out*.

emerge, having to do with what kind of associations are to be sought out, identified and theologically organised. The Twelve is a good place to test these particular issues, because its 'constituence', its being constituted as twelve separate sections, does not release one from the challenge of making sense of its present arrangement and its presentation as a theological statement of God's work in Israel and the nations.

EXAMPLES FROM THE MASORETIC TEXT OF HOSEA-NAHUM

Here I am only summarizing work that has gone on for a decade and more, so as to assess the hermeneutical significance in a movement from 'man' to 'text'. Much of what you read here may sound new, as the twelve Minor Prophets – or a selection from them – are allowed to provide literary and historical context, one for another. This is a departure from standard operating procedure. I will assume that the links I am pointing to have been argued for, relatively successfully, even though it may appear that I am the one proposing them. This makes my task a bit tricky. But to repeat: my interest is not in defending these linkages spotted by others, but in understanding what is at stake in taking an ancient witness and hearing it through the lens of a more recent witness, as in the case of Joel providing a concrete occasion for hearing the call to repentance at the end of Hosea. To ignore this kind of context in the name of historical context is wrongly to foreshorten what we mean by history and a properly historical approach. My more contentious point is that those who claim that their reading is more historically appropriate – a reading in which the individual prophets are isolated from one another, recast according to date, and placed in a reconstructed temporal context – are actually the ones who are not reading the prophets sufficiently historically. For final canonical form is also a piece of history, belonging to decisions made in the past about how an ancient prophetic witness is finally to be heard.²⁴

We begin at the beginning: *Hosea's signal position and larger implications*. That Hosea is the first prophet in the Twelve is not so hard to account for as the fact of a late book like Joel being second or Amos third and following it (a 'problem' the LXX order appears to have 'resolved'). Hosea is a near contemporary of Amos so who might come first is a close-run matter. The rabbis thought the reference to God

²⁴ See my discussion in C. Bartholomew, C. S. Evans, M. Healy, M. Rae (eds), *'Behind' the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, 2003) in the chapter entitled, 'What Lesson Will History Teach? The Book of the Twelve as History', pp. 443-69.

speaking at first to Hosea (1:2) could be translated into an answer to the question about his initial position in the Twelve. Formally more interesting is the matching of the superscription of Hosea to that of Isaiah, which could imply a desire to correlate the Twelve with Isaiah, as has been argued: both have a long history of composition and historical range.²⁵ I cannot go into that here.²⁶

If we leave Joel to the side for the moment, it is possible to account for the narrower question as to why the tradents of Israel's two early 'writing prophets' wanted Hosea to be the lens through which Amos was heard, as well as the lens through which the entire Twelve might be best seen. Jeremias has persuasively argued that the two books have been edited in such a way as to avoid any (1) historicizing of their message (the message is for someone in the past), (2) localizing of their indictments (the message is for the northern kingdom only), or (3) interest in keeping their messages specified and isolated one from the other. Here is a sample from his very illuminating essay:

I can understand these literary connections (between Hosea and Amos)... only if the pupils of Amos and the pupils of Hosea who handed down the message of the prophets wanted to teach their readers that they could not grasp the central ideas of these prophets by reading their books in complete isolation from one another. By contrast, the readers of the written words of the prophets were supposed to notice the similarity of Amos's and Hosea's message from God. The pupils were not interested in stressing the differences between the two prophets. The literary structure of both prophetic books – from the initial level shows that these books were meant as associated entities and should not be read as isolated pericopes. The literary connections between these books show that they should be read in relation to each other.... I want to show that these traditionists are on their way to discovering something like a common prophetic theology, not by denying that each prophet lived in singular historical circumstances, but by denying that this fact is decisive for their message.²⁷

²⁵ See Steck, *Der Abschluss der Prophetie*.

²⁶ Cf. J. Treballe-Barrera, 'Qumran Evidence for a Biblical Standard Text and for Non-Standard and Parabiblical Texts,' in T. H. Lim with L. Hurtado, A. G. Auld, A. Jack (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 95.

²⁷ J. Jeremias 'The Interrelationship Between Amos and Hosea,' in J. D. Watts and P. R. House (eds), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays in Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (Sheffield, 1996), pp. 171-86.

But why Hosea first, even in an intentionally affiliated relationship such as Jeremias has argued for? The answer has several interrelated features. Hosea introduces the theme of YHWH's patience, and urges its centrality by clear intertextual links to the foundational account of Moses and God's forbearance at Sinai, following the golden calf incident (the names of Hosea's children, 'not my people' and 'no compassion' play on the dialogues between God and Moses in Exodus about *whose* people the murmuring Israelites are, and on the compassionate and merciful formula from Exodus 33-34).²⁸ This theme, God's patience, is crucial in assessing what follows in God's history with Israel and the nations in the Twelve's unfolding.²⁹ In addition, the formal links are much clearer in the Twelve than in the Pentateuch due to the repeated appearance of the formula, 'YHWH compassionate and merciful', at several key points (Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Mic. 7:18; Nah. 1:2).

Second, Hosea ends with an exhortation to the reader, and in this sense it is similar to other reader-directed shaping such as we find at another beginning: Psalm 1 of the Psalter Collection. Van Leeuwen, in a brilliant essay, has tracked the editorial function of this appeal to the wise reader, and especially the way in which it is reinforced in the sequential unfolding of the first six books – to my mind, a good indication of the sense of the Masoretic order, which is no longer sustained in the LXX.³⁰

Third, this bit of canonical shaping is preceded by a lengthy call to repentance (14:1-7) whose force does not take hold within the compass of

²⁸ See the interesting analysis of R. C. Van Leeuwen, 'Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,' in L. G. Perdue, B. Scott, W. Wiseman (eds), *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville, 1993), pp. 31-49.

²⁹ 'The writing of Hosea was deliberately placed in the first position, although the historical prophet Amos probably delivered his oracles earlier than Hosea. The redactors wanted the reader to perceive the warning of Amos in the light of Hosea' (A. Scharf, 'Reconstructing the Redaction History of the Twelve Prophets: Problems and Methods' in *Reading and Hearing*, pp. 34-48). 'Why does Hosea precede Amos? Perhaps length and unwillingness to interrupt the clear connections of Joel, Amos, and Obadiah explain the priority of Hosea' (J. Crenshaw, *Joel*, [New York, 1995], p. 22). The categorical denunciation of Judah/Israel in Amos 1-2 is best heard against the Lord's roaring from Zion at the end of Joel, where he is a 'refuge for his people' (Joel 3:16; cf. Amos 1:2). See the discussion below.

³⁰ Van Leeuwen, 'Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy'. Van Leeuwen sheds particular light on the link from Hosea 14:9 to Micah 4:5.

Hosea as an individual book.³¹ It is a bit of final instruction from Hosea which sits now over the journey one is about to embark on in the unfolding of the Minor Prophets as a whole. That this is more than a piece of neutral observation is underscored by two further features. The book of Joel makes the call to repentance central to its presentation, where the theme of the compassionate YHWH is explicitly invoked (2:13; anticipating a latter scene of repentance and its aftermath, now not for Israel but for Nineveh, in Jonah; 'mourning beasts' is also a theme they share, see Joel 1:20 and Jonah 3:8).³² In other words, Joel provides an instance of quasi-liturgical enactment of the call for repentance (see 1:13ff), such as is initiated in Hosea (14:1-7), and demonstrates as well YHWH's willingness to respond and restore precisely those aspects of fertility and bounty withheld in Hosea's day (Joel 2:19).

More subtle is the present location of Amos, following Joel, in the light of the theme of repentance. The lapidary refrain, 'for three transgressions and for four I will not revoke', which is literally, 'will not cause it to *return*' is not lapidary when one reckons with Hosea's introduction of the theme ('return, O Israel'), and Joel's enactment of it. 'I will not cause it to return' means 'I will not be a welcome agent of repentance, *à la* Hosea 14:1-7.' Furthermore, when the crescendo indictment of first Judah, and then Israel, is made clear, this is an indictment to be heard within the context of YHWH's longstanding care and commitment to his people. The LORD does 'roar from Zion', as Joel states (EJV 3:16) and Amos immediately seconds (1:2), but primarily at the effrontery of the nations. The conclusion of Joel and the opening litany against the nations in Amos 1:3-2:3 makes this clear. Seen from this perspective, the indictment by YHWH of his own people occurs in the context provided by Joel and Hosea before him, where repentance is called for and enacted. As Joel puts it after his reference to YHWH's roaring from Zion (3:16): 'but the LORD is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel'. It is precisely this horizon of great theological depth through which we can now see the mitigation of Amos 9:8b: not 'roses and lavender instead of blood and iron' (in the telling phrase of Wellhausen), but a judgement whose intent was always to cleanse and purify, not extinguish. In short, the final form of Amos, by the fact of its location and juxtaposition, takes its larger theological bearings from the witness of Hosea and Exodus, and Joel's position helps make those bearings even clearer – indeed unmistakable.

³¹ T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah* (Sheffield, 1993).

³² Collins, *Mantle*, p. 72.

There is not time to extend this reading of the Twelve beyond making a few further observations and discussing their hermeneutical significance for a fresh approach to the prophets. The fact that manifestly later books (Joel, but also Obadiah and Jonah) have found their place beside earlier and explicitly dated ones is not just a datum awaiting scholarly discovery and reassignment according to a theory of the history or development of Israelite prophecy. Joel's anthological character and indebtedness to earlier prophetic works has long been noted.³³ Obadiah's indictment of Edom would appear to best fit an historical period close to the fall of Jerusalem (though that is contested and is not required). Jonah contains several features which argue for a late date – some of them only noticed by an historical-critical mentality tuned to look for such things in the past 150 years. But it is one thing to make this diachronic observation and quite another to let the fact of the present location of these books stand and to inquire as to their significance. This too is a piece of serious historical inquiry.³⁴

When one adds to this observations about beginnings and endings of books; repeated themes, like the compassionate-formula, or drought and famine and their opposites; or reader-oriented appeals to learn from the past and re-orient oneself towards God's ways and self, it becomes clear that the placements of later books next to earlier ones is an intentional move, arising from the canonical process itself, and is not a reader-response imposition by readers tired of older approaches and looking for new ones.³⁵ Just as the LORD's roaring from Zion ends Joel and begins Amos, Amos ends with a promise of Edom's demise (9:12), and Obadiah unhesitatingly describes it. Jonah provides an occasion of, not Israelite but Ninevite, repentance, which makes the prophet sore but which reminds the reader that God is not above relenting over evil powers like Edom (whom he has punished in Obadiah already) or even the powerful nation of Assyria. He can treat them with the same patience and kindness he has lavished on his own people in, in different ways and dispensations, in Hosea, Joel, Amos, or in the context of Edom's destruction in Obadiah (17-21). Micah establishes the limits of God's patience, now toward the preserved remnant

³³ Joel is a particularly important book in the redaction of the Twelve. See among many other works, J. Nogalski, 'Joel as "Literary Anchor" for the Book of the Twelve,' in *Reading and Hearing*, pp. 91-109.

³⁴ This is the point of my essay, 'What Lesson Will History Teach?', cited above.

³⁵ E. Conrad sees the force of the issue in his new book, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Towards a New Canonical Criticism* (JSOTSS 376; London/New York, 2003).

of Judah, strikingly at the exact middle point of the twelve as a whole (3:12) – a prophecy which bore repeating in a later conflict over Jeremiah's similar preaching against the temple and king (see Jer. 26:18).

Joel helps us to hear the indictments of Amos in their proper long-range context. So also the uplifting oracle of Isaiah 2:1-4 (itself a response to judgement in Isaiah 1) finds another placement in Micah 4, now following the death sentence, not over the northern kingdom as previously in the Twelve, but over Zion. The refrain noted by Van Leeuwen at Micah 4:5, which differs from its Isaiah counterpart at 2:5, functions, in its difference, to orient the reader along the lines established at the close of Hosea ('each one walks in the name of his god, but we will walk...', similar to Hosea 11:9, 'for the ways of the LORD are right and the upright walk in them'). The final lines of Micah underscore this link: 'who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression', now, 'over the remnant of your possession' – that is, those who have walked upright, in God's ways. The compassionate formula from Exodus is drawn upon to remind the reader of God's long-suffering and final heart to save. Sins are even cast into a sea as deep as Jonah's contrite praying! (Mic. 7:19). And from that depth comes hopefulness and new life on another shore.

This hope is established in part, as in Isaiah, by God's removal of Assyria as agent of his just judgement (Isa. 10:5ff). So in spite of his mercy toward Assyria in Jonah's day, Nahum reasserts the other dimension of his character, 'The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty', for, in the case of Nineveh, 'who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?' (Nah. 3:19).

Thus far we are only demonstrating ways to read the Twelve as an integrated and intentional final composition, as has been argued recently by scholars. Nothing has been said which would diminish the need to honour the individuality of the witness, nor attention to a book's historical context. Far from it. Three spaces (though not the usual four) separate each of these prophetic works in manuscripts, and we have noted the strength of arguments which locate the undated books in a later period of composition.³⁶ But to say this is only to stand at the start of the interpretative task.

Alongside these editorial and compositional factors, moreover, are important hermeneutical signals which must be studied and assessed for their proper proportionality and significance. The juxtaposing of late and

³⁶ D. L. Peterson, 'A Book of the Twelve?' in *Reading and Preaching*, pp. 3-10.

early is not just a matter of the clever matching of kindred themes or catchwords, or the tidying up of historical gaps and inconsistencies after the fact. Here we approach the heart of canonical reading, that is, that aspect of God's word to Israel which continues to press for a hearing and addresses new generations with an old word, borne of a specific time and specific application, and without shedding that, moving forward through time to enclose new readers and new situations. Deuteronomy makes this point with urgency and passion in respect of the Decalogue: 'not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant today, but with us, all of us, here today' (5:3).

Of course the covenant was made with the old fathers, but the rhetorical point is what Deuteronomy is insisting on. Early and late may be particular indexes prized by readers seeking a handle on the interpretation of Israel's prophets, and sorting out the generations may help one gain a better sense of the precision and context of the prophet's word of address. But this should not hinder pressing ahead to ask the hermeneutical question posed by the juxtaposing of early and later witnesses – especially in a place like the Book of the Twelve where the evidence for this is supplied by virtue of the decision to retain clear boundaries for one prophet and his neighbours on either side.

And here we move at last to the place where I began, with Smith's provocative displaying of the world of Amos, such that, in his hands, past and present merged and we could almost smell the desert air of the rural shepherd. The problem with this approach is that it had to let fall to the side all that did not suit the reconstruction, and so the material form of the witness – first tentatively and then more aggressively – receded before the reconstruction said to be generating it. It was up to the interpreter to give us the precise profile of the man, so that we could get in his boots, and be 'left alone in the company of the author'. But were there no guidelines being set by the text itself which anticipated this hermeneutical ditch, separating our air from the air of the desert of Amos, and helping us take our proper place? Could not a text, to use a modern expression, 'act like a man'?

Smith was surely right to sense in the material before him some distinct urgency, a call for hearing, a pressure for reception if not imitation and obedience, some compelling ingredient which made Amos come alive, which tradition has strained to describe as 'the word of God, living and active'. But we were left, in his treatment and more so in those which followed his, at the mercy of the interpreter to know how to bridge the past and come alongside God's word, ever pressing for a hearing. Instead of leaving us alone in the company of the author, we pretty much found

ourselves in the company of an Amos that Smith had asked the text to give up, and not display on the terms of its own literary presentation. The author we were left alone with was George Adam Smith! In his case, that was not a bad place to be. But the clutch released on the mechanisms of experiential-expressive reading took us on a journey which, in the course of time, would lead to extremes of historicist minimalism or reader-response scepticism, a scepticism now supplying linkages in front of and not behind the material form of the witness.

CONCLUSIONS

Serious discussion about whether or not this or that text is 'authentic' does not play out against the backdrop of moral urgency it once did, in part because we have come to see the key role tradents and the community have in shaping the prophetic word.³⁷ The very notion of a canonical process assumes a doctrine of inspiration that spills out from the prophetic word once delivered, as God superintends that word toward his own accomplishing end. This being the case, 'authenticity' loses its power to persuade in the realm of 'copyright protection or infringement', as interpretation now assesses a wider range of what might count for inspired prophetic discourse. The community does not add its own corrections and supplements: that is too reductionistic a view of God's word spoken.³⁸ Rather, it sees the original word pressing forward towards a horizon God alone means to illumine, with recourse to that original word of his own, divulged by the work of the Holy Spirit in a new day.

This being so, decisions about secondary levels of textual history no longer come with automatic aspersions and a sense of some inferior species of inspiration and cogency being thrust at us, as we move from *man* to *text* in the crude manner of much nineteenth century reflection. What we have endeavoured to describe, as well, is the hermeneutical character of a

³⁷ Surely much of the credit for this goes to the canonical approach of B. S. Childs. For a discussion of this issue in a broader context, see now T. Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford, 2002).

³⁸ An early work which tried to deal with this issue sensitively – no small feat – was David Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon* (Tübingen, 1986). It was not in my judgement an altogether successful effort, because it struggled to describe the pressure of previous inspired speech on secondary interpretation and elaboration. I believe one of the most intriguing exegetical efforts to work this out is Childs's treatment of Daniel in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 608-23.

text's secondary transmission and reshaping. I will conclude with several final observations.

My final remarks all have to do with the subtle matter of how the reader is to identify with the prophetic witness. In some ways, experientialist reading (wittingly or unwittingly) sought to get us alongside the prophet, and may even have suggested thereby that we were to identify with the prophet as prophet, without a lot of reflection on just how or why this might be an appropriate point of standing for those of us manifestly outside the circle of 'prophets and apostles'. This is not an altogether tidy affair, I admit, and identification need not have meant, 'I too am an Amos in my day and this kind of reading is good at showing why that is so.'

Still, in what sense is the prophetic word a privileged word, delivered up by the power of the Holy Spirit to elected agents (for this is how both OT and NT understand the office), and therefore is a word addressing us, overtaking us, and in some sense directing us and asking of us obedience and deference – that is, not asking us to identify with the prophet except only as he too understands that same word given to him to deliver as a word of address and a word 'over his own head' as it were?

Attention to the canonical shaping helps us see that even the individual prophets belong to a larger history and sweep than they as individuals were able to recognize at the time (and this pains Habakkuk when he does recognize it, in the transition from one age of violence, the Assyrian, to the next, the Babylonian). And what is true of these prophets as men within Israel's history – and this is a history with Israel and the nations and the created order itself, and is no private affair: this is what attention to the Twelve as a whole shows us – will become a fact in respect of a history including Israel and the nations and creation in Jesus Christ. Israel's history as depicted in the Twelve is a type or figure of a larger history, and a story which takes two testaments to tell. Amos is a man among Twelve and the Twelve are men related to one Man: Jesus Christ.

We are trying to show that identification with the world of the prophet is available on terms other than the usual experiential access, in romantic 'behind the text' or post-modern 'in front of the text' modes. Joel brings the world of Hoses and Amos into the framework of his later context of exhortation, repentance, and restoration, at a time of severe natural disruption (the judgement of a locust plague as an example of Hosea's want of bounty and fertility); and at the same time, the audience of Joel, however we understand that, is transported back in time to re-live the testimony of two prophets of the eighth century, and to learn the lessons requisite of that period, now with the potential for change of heart and

mind. And with that unclear 'Joel audience' (precisely because so unclear) we modern men and women go too, in whatever way God means that to be a journey for us to take in our day, in his new deliverances of judgement and mercy.

The idea that a word from the past outlives original audiences and the one who delivered it both, is explicitly detailed at a pivotal moment of the Twelve's transition, at the beginning of Zechariah (1:1-6). The preface to the book tells us that former prophets spoke, and their words overtook the generations to whom they were proclaimed, and lived on, bringing about a confession, 'The LORD of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and our deeds, just as he planned to do' (1:6). And with that confession and recognition registered, prophecy goes forth again, even in the strange and somewhat novel form – a form which 'seer' Amos might barely recognise – of visions, now visions of the night. New generations are addressed by a former word, and the former word gives rise to new prophetic discourse of a different but yet continuous character.

Still, within that past period of 'former prophets,' as we have seen in the case of Joel, the reader is not simply placed down to look around neutrally and conclude, 'how dreadful it all was, abandoned to false choices and the wages of disobedience'. There is a point of identification with the prophet that is neither inoculation nor a walk of innocence and later calm amidst past sin and sorrow. Recognition of the integrated – and carefully so – character of secondary levels of tradition opens up a fresh hermeneutical option not seen in the days of George Adam Smith, even though he might well have grasped at it with good intuition and godly exegetical instinct.

Both Jonah and Habakkuk contain a kind of speech-form unusual in the prophetic books and in the mouths of the prophets especially. This form is the psalm, and we know well that psalms resist historicization (the School of Antioch often came to grief on this issue). Both psalms tell of audacious hope in the midst of death, in the belly of a whale and in the belly of history's dark unfolding. Jonah's tribute to the Almighty is so unanticipated – prior to his disgorgement on safe shores – that the Gordian knot of interpretation is regularly cut and the psalm excised or moved to a 'better place' (how might we ever know what that is?). In its present place, however, it is both a powerful reminder that praise is a lesson best learned when all is dark, and praise even so hard-won can tragically be short-lived. Jonah goes from praise to obedience to success to sulk. But not to condemnation I think, for God remains solicitous to our struggling hero right to the end.

Habakkuk also suffers the indignity – though that is too weak a word – of being set before a divine revelation which seems interiorly unjust and

unpalatable: the odd divine justice that defeats injustice by using a violent judge (Hab. 1:13-14). The last word of this book is not a divine question, as in Jonah, but a remarkable psalm (3:1-17) in a similar place of great darkness, in the belly of God's strange superintendence of time, to extend the image from above. This psalm is not a secondary intrusion, even as it manifestly belongs to other contexts than Habakkuk, and we cannot judge ourselves shrewd historical-critics for seeing what is so obvious, and which must have been obvious to others before us and before the rise of the historical-critical method as a 'science'. Habakkuk the prophet does give us access to a world in which we are to make identification, and in this way, his final word is the best way to see a path not finally taken by Jonah, our pained antagonist wrestling with God's justice and forbearance. Jonah is not condemned, for the lesson he is meant to learn is not an easy one to learn, and we delude ourselves if we think it is and that Jonah is only held up for our condescending disapproval. To say that is not only wrongly to identify with a prophet as prophet, but to identify as if we actually knew better.

Habakkuk shows us a better way, and yet it is also a higher way, a way of identification that is proper for the reader. Habakkuk awaits a day of great darkness, as God goes about the business of judgement and cleansing. God is for our man Habakkuk unveiled in dark and powerful form, a form which brought deliverance in its day for Israel, but which is now uncloaked to a different and far more difficult end. In spite of this, in the midst of this, Habakkuk is able, is made able, to give utterance to hope, when there is no earthly reason for it whatsoever. 'Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines' – though Hosea's and Amos's most dismal prophecies come to pass – 'yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exalt in the God of my salvation. God, the LORD, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights' (3:17-19).

To conclude, then, this brief examination of hermeneutics and identification, a canonical reading of the Twelve, far from shutting off the experiential world of Amos and his colleagues, situates us properly, and him, and them, so that we might gaze on the history of God's word with Israel, and nations, and creation, and finally with his own Son. Such a reading teaches us where to stand and where to identify our proper place in that history, which providentially reaches out to enclose us even now in God's judgement and mercy. Smith could move from the world of the prophets to the pulpit, and bring alive the man Amos for his audience. A canonical reading of Amos among the Twelve gives us a world of reference and identification no less bold and no less enclosing of us and our world

than that; *and it does it on the terms of its own deliverance*. We are made to stand before the Twelve and see the word go forth, address generations, enclose the prophets in a history larger than themselves, and then reach out and locate us in its grand sweep – in judgement and in mercy – before that same holy God. He makes known those two great dispensations of his character – final judgement and final mercy – in his only Son, that we might at last by his grace identify even with him, and see through the judgements of our day into the eternity of his purposes. If then our confession becomes remotely like that which Habakkuk uttered in his day, we may count ourselves blessed beyond all measure.

So there is indeed a future for the powerful experiential readings of a G. A. Smith, but harnessed and tuned to the canonical shape of the texts before us. The existential dimension is not conjured up by the interpreter deploying historical tools, but makes its force felt through close reading and attention to the final-form presentation. Here we all need to go to school again. An earlier history of interpretation functioned with a view of intentionality which did not abstract the human author from the work said to be associated with him. Some stronger historicism is not being called on here to give us back the book of Amos as the authentic work of someone now to be called ‘the historical Amos’. That way has been tried and it failed because it did not deal carefully with the text as it lies before us.

Attention to the canonical form lets the text ‘act like a man’ by observing where and when and on what terms the prophetic figure is being given to us, as the messenger of God’s word, and also as a participant in a drama larger than himself. Such attention also gives us a place to stand within the drama, which we are privileged not only to observe but also be drawn into, by virtue of Christ’s inhabiting of Israel’s former story (the force of Luke 24:27). Christ it is who gives us a place to stand, while the text of the now ‘old’ Testament shows us where to stand. Experiential-expressive reading is not foreclosed by canonical reading. Rather, it is given proper focus and direction.