

**Sherri BROWN and Francis J. MOLONEY, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2019, 19 × 24 cm, xv-271 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7519-8**

John S. Adimula

Volume 73, Number 3, September–December 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1079876ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1079876ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

ISSN

0316-5345 (print)

2562-9905 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Adimula, J. S. (2021). Review of [Sherri BROWN and Francis J. MOLONEY, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2019, 19 × 24 cm, xv-271 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7519-8]. *Science et Esprit*, 73(3), 449–451. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1079876ar>

Sherri BROWN and Francis J. MOLONEY, **Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction**. Grand Rapids MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2019, 19 × 24 cm, xv-271 p., ISBN 978-0-8028-7519-8.

The book is divided into 9 chapters including the conclusion. The illustrations and the short descriptions of terms in almost all the pages add to the simplicity of the presentation of the work. It is a textbook designed for the students of the New Testament and for classroom teachers. The arrangement of the presentation follows this order: the overview of the origin of the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments), methods of biblical interpretation, exposition of biblical narrative, and the introduction of Jesus, his teaching and followers. The authors, Sherri Brown and Francis Moloney (henceforth: B & M) note that it is necessary to understand this process before one could delve into a sound interpretation of the texts of the New Testament. The book is not a work on the exegesis of the texts but a general background to prepare students for proper exegesis of each text of the New Testament.

In the introductory section, B & M discuss some basic terminologies in the New Testament (NT) as a sacred text and theology of Christianity, such as scripture, sacred scripture, Christ Event, apocalypse, exegesis, ethics, morality, ecclesiology, cosmology, eschatology, soteriology. The definitions of these terms are useful for the beginners of the NT studies. Setting out these at the outset of a textbook like this aids the readers to comprehend their usages in the following chapters. B & M also explain the literary approach which forms the foundation for their analyses in the entire book. At the end of each chapter, they try to give theological insights into the subject (s) discussed with the title “what have we learned so far?” after which some questions for reflection and review based on the topic of each chapter are provided.

In chapter one, they discuss the origins and development of the Bible which touch on the history and development of the Jewish and Christian canons. The complexity of the collection of the books/texts of the Bible is exposed and shown why it is important to understand this beginning for proper discussion of the contents of the biblical texts. The Bible as a Sacred Scripture of Christians is born out of the believing communities through their experiences of God and relationship to the rest of the society. They mention the world that gave birth to the Bible starting from the word of mouth (called the oral tradition), sharing and passing on human-God relationship experience from one generation to the next.

Owing to internal and external forces, the communities of faith decided to commit the oral tradition into writing. The Jewish people started the literal form of their history around 1000 BCE during King David's reign. Likewise, the early Christians moved from oral tradition to writing beginning with Paul's writings. B & M explain how the books of the NT came to be regarded as canon, following the list of twenty-seven books in the Easter Letter (367 CE) of Athanasius after years of debate. The list was accepted in the West (Latin tradition) under Pope Innocent I. There are three major criteria that a book must possess in order to be included in the canon: 1) apostolic authority, 2) usefulness for morals and faith, 3) popularity and early communities' usage.

They identify the influence of Hellenism on the production of the Scripture aided by cultural and linguistic unity in the Greek colonies. Hebrew Scriptures were

translated to Greek which eventually came to be called the Septuagint with four-part division: Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom Books, and Prophets. This was what the early Christians adopted in the Greek-speaking world. By the time of the Second Temple Judaism, there were already more movements and groups: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and Jesus Movement.

Chapter two focuses on the methodology of biblical interpretation through three steps: 1) the world behind the text, 2) the world in the text, 3) the world in front of the text. The dominant method of interpretation in the 20th and early 21st centuries is historical-critical method which seeks to establish the original meaning of a text using historical and literary criticism. Under the world behind the text, the following methods are found: textual criticism, historical criticism and source criticism. In analyzing the world in the text, these approaches could be employed: literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Under the world in front of the text, one employs narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism and audience-response/reader-response criticism.

In chapters three and four, B & M discuss the overview of the stories of the OT and NT respectively. The story of Israel is traced from the book of Genesis through Abraham and other Jewish ancestors, Moses and the Sinai covenant, David and the Nation (the promise of Messiah), the rise of the prophets to the time of Exile and post-exilic era. It continues to the era of the Roman Empire, leading to the NT era. Chapter four continues with the Roman Empire in which milieu the story of Jesus is outlined and the birth of Christianity. Prominent in this era is John the Baptist. The early Christians try to interpret the Jewish scriptures in light of the Christ Event and see in Jesus of Nazareth the expected messiah. B & M point out that when John speaks of Jesus as the one who comes after him (cf. Jn 1:15, 27, 30), it could indicate that Jesus might have once been John's follower (p. 99). This position may be unnecessary to uphold. It does not follow that because John speaks of Jesus in such a way then it portrays that the latter was once the former's disciple.

The resurrection becomes the turning point and the force behind the Jesus movement and the development of Christianity. Four stages are noted in this development: 1) Palestinian Aramaic-speaking Christianity (30s CE), 2) Jewish Christianity in the Greco-Roman Empire (40s CE), 3) Christianity in the Greco-Roman World (50s CE), 4) the first Jewish Revolt and its aftermath (60s-130s CE). The last stage dealt a great blow on the Temple and Jerusalem. The latter was burnt while the former was destroyed. The second Jewish Revolt against Rome (132-135 CE) further devastated the Jewish people and saw the separation of Judaism and Christianity as distinct religious traditions.

Chapter five is devoted to the narrative aspects of the NT: the Gospels and Acts. B & M point out the distinction between the synoptic Gospels and the fourth Gospel, and also the similarities and differences that exist among the synoptic Gospels. Following the same order of approach, they discuss the world behind the Gospels and Acts which involves the formation of the community of believers, their teaching about their experiences, the development of the oral teaching about Jesus and the early church, and the eventual putting into writing the oral traditions. The world in the Gospels and Acts focuses on the literary genre, characters, settings, plots of these narratives, and also the problems surrounding their authorship and dates.

Paul and his letters form the discussion in chapter six. The controversy associated with the authorship of the letters attributed to Paul is expressed. After some expositions of the life of Paul, a sketch of his letters is given which explains the world in his letters and their characters. Paul understands Jesus to be more than a human mediator (as was Abraham, Moses, and others) but also the divine Son of God who is the climax of Israel's story and a turning point in God's salvation history.

The letter to the Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles are the focus of chapter seven. Hebrews is more or less a written treatise or homily than a letter (though with an epistolary ending). It develops the theme of the priesthood of Jesus as the messiah. The Catholic Epistles are also known as the General Letters: James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, and the Johannine Epistles (1, 2 & 3 John).

The last chapter is devoted to providing insights into the apocalyptic literature and the last book of the NT: Revelation. A clear distinction is made in the meaning of apocalyptic which literally means "unveiling" and not necessarily connotes the end of the world but rather the end of the world as we know it.

In general, this textbook will be useful to NT students, especially in understanding the general background to the texts of the NT. It does not necessarily take a position in its expositions and analyses of the world behind, in, and in front of the NT books/letters that one may easily notice and then offer some constructive criticism. It only states different scholars' positions, which is what the textbook does in most cases.

John S. ADIMULA

*Faculty of Theology  
Dominican University College  
Ottawa*

Marie-Anne VANNIER, **Maître Eckhart Prédicateur** (Mystiques chrétiens d'Orient et d'Occident, 4); préface de Markus VINZENT. Paris, Beauchesne, 2018, 15,5 × 24 cm, 858 p., ISBN 978-2-7010-2287-1.

Ce volume collige vingt-cinq années de recherches et de publications de l'auteure, une érudite du monde francophone de l'œuvre et de la pensée de Maître Eckhart et de la mystique rhénane. Apparaît ici non seulement toute l'envergure de la recherche internationale sur Eckhart et son temps, dans laquelle l'auteure est engagée, mais aussi les analyses fines des principaux textes clés du Thuringien. L'introduction simplement intitulée « Redécouvrir Eckhart » justifie la publication de ses textes disséminés avec l'intention de rendre accessible pour aujourd'hui l'œuvre d'Eckhart. Sept grandes sections organisent la matière. Ce volume offre à une personne intéressée et curieuse une initiation, voire une exploration de l'univers eckhartien. Voyons tout d'abord rapidement les contenus des sections avant d'en faire une évaluation critique. La première section (21-52) intitulée « La prédication » présente la perspective retenue par Vannier afin de comprendre l'œuvre d'Eckhart. Ces premières pages donnent le ton des autres sections, qui insisteront tantôt sur des analyses textuelles particulières, tantôt sur des arguments ou des démonstrations qui