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A Dialogue: Richard Hays's *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*

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Scriptural Echoes and Gospel Interpretation: Some Questions

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Abstract — This essay raises questions about Richard Hays’s book in three main areas. First, there is a discussion of the possible limits to metalepsis, and when it may be appropriate to decline to find metalepsis in a biblical citation. Second, there are questions about the nature of readers and reading in relation to appropriating some of Hays’s proposals. Third, something is said about the respective roles of historical and figural ways of reading the OT, and questions are asked about the bearing of the conceptuality of OT prophecy on the Gospel depictions of Jesus.

Key Words — Richard B. Hays, metalepsis, Yeats’s “The Second Coming,” hermeneutics, figural reading, prophetic conceptuality, divinization

It is an honor and a delight to be invited to respond to Richard Hays’s *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*,¹ which is an important continuation and development of his previous work on early Christian understanding and appropriation of Israel’s Scriptures, especially his *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*.²

The privilege of being invited to be a respondent in a special edition of *JTI* means that, to use Hays’s terms, we become some of the first to join with him in the next stage of a particular conversation that bears on the integrity and the future of Christian biblical interpretation (pp. 348–49).³ To use a different image, however, we respondents are a kind of loyal opposition, whose task is to critique and to ask hard questions, to *test* Hays’s proposals, and to enable readers to be alert and appropriately critical in their reading and appropriating of what Hays has written.

1. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

2. Idem, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

3. All page numbers cited in the main text of this article refer to *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*.



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Hays's thesis consists of three main elements. First, he shows how the Evangelists' portrayal of Jesus is "the product of a catalytic fusion of Israel's Scripture and the story of Jesus" (p. 8). Although this is in principle already well-recognized, Hays sets out the evidence with an unprecedented care, thoroughness, and conceptual sophistication in terms of all four Evangelists. Second, Hays argues that this portrayal is not a matter of some kind of midrashic fancy, that only makes sense in terms of first-century hermeneutics but cannot be replicated or appropriated by readers in the 21st century. Rather, it is to be taken with full imaginative seriousness by contemporary readers, whose literary sensibilities have been enlarged to appreciate figural readings. There is a summons to a conversion of the imagination and to a recognition that "to read Scripture well we must bid farewell to plodding literalism and rationalism in order to embrace *a complex poetic sensibility*" (p. 360). Third, Hays contends for the theological importance of this figural reading of Scripture, a reading that *narrates* the identity of Jesus as the embodiment of the God of Israel in a way that should supersede the conceptuality used in familiar arguments about "high" and "low" Christology (p. 364) and enable fresh appreciation of Jesus and his significance for (would-be) faith in God.

This is a major work in every way, as welcome as it is ground-breaking. Discussions about "the use of the OT in the NT" in the past were easily regarded as something of an optional sideshow, perhaps for those who were interested in the oddities of ancient hermeneutics that enabled texts to be read in ingenious and implausible ways. These debates are being transformed by Hays and others, as contemporary readers are enabled freshly to appreciate the formative role of engagement with Israel's Scriptures not only for the articulation of that theology and Christology that became normative for Christian faith in the NT but also for its enduring significance.

As Hays argues his thesis, he gives regular attention along the way to various possible objections and queries. Especially interesting in this regard is his discussion, in the conclusion, of both the strengths and the (at least potential) weaknesses of the hermeneutical strategies of each Evangelist (pp. 349–56).⁴ Nonetheless, there are some areas where arguably less attention is given than might be to possible difficulties of an in-principle nature—or, at least, so it seemed to me as I read. My purpose here, therefore, is to try to articulate some of these. In doing so, I hope to complement and perhaps sharpen Hays's arguments and help make a good thesis better.

4. I am surprised, however, that Hays sees a potential weakness in John's hermeneutic strategy in John 8:39–47, on the grounds that John "seems to consign those who fail to believe in Jesus to utter destruction, most notoriously in John 8" and "those who reject John's readings are characterized in the text as diabolical and ontologically estranged from God" (pp. 306, 355), without apparently recognizing that Jesus's interlocutors are characterized as children of the devil in this context specifically *because they are trying to kill Jesus and being murderous is diabolical* (John 8:40, 44).

METALEPSIS AND ITS POSSIBLE LIMITS

My first question is methodological, though also, in consequence, substantive. It relates to the role of metalepsis, which plays a fundamental role throughout the book. Hays defines metalepsis thus: “Metalepsis is a literary technique of citing or echoing a small bit of a precursor text in such a way that the reader can grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling or recovering the original context from which the fragmentary echo came, and then reading the two texts in dialogical juxtaposition” (p. 11). His own nice introductory illustration of how this works is the way Barack Obama, in his 2008 presidential victory speech, twice clearly echoed the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. (though he did not mention King by name). This was not only to attract some of the luster of the great civil rights leader but also to evoke some of the biblical imagery of moving toward the promised land on which King himself was drawing. Hays also observes that “examples of this kind could be multiplied endlessly because our discourse is inherently intertextual and allusive” (p. 12).

However, even if one fully grants Hays’s basic contention about the importance of metalepsis in the Gospels, as I am happy to do, there remains an in-principle question that Hays himself does not raise, either here or in his earlier work on Paul where he proposes seven criteria (“tests”) for “hearing echoes.”⁵ Hays is so concerned to establish that metalepsis is valid that he does not ask when it might be invalid. He does not ask what are the critical limits to, or controls on, proposed examples of metalepsis. Even if discourse is inherently intertextual and allusive, what are the possible limits to valid (or appropriate, or justifiable) intertextuality? When might one be justified in declining to recognize a proposed metaleptic allusion? Although Hays recognizes in principle that proposals to resist metalepsis might be raised, his consistent concern is to urge that metalepsis is in fact present throughout the Gospels. Thus, for example: “It is possible, of course, that Matthew has randomly lifted a phrase out of this setting in Jer 6 without awareness of or concern for its original context. In light of all we have seen of his skillful and highly intentional uses of Scripture, however, this seems unlikely” (p. 157). But there are issues here that are more difficult than Hays allows—however hard it is to work in this area on other than a case-by-case basis, or to articulate criteria other than the exercise of informed and responsible (but contestable!) judgment. His easy use of a pejorative “randomly” sidesteps difficulties too quickly.

Let me offer an example of what I have in mind. One of the most famous poems of the 20th century is W. B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming.” It is a poem in two parts. The first depicts the problem of modern civilization, the second an anticipated outcome to the problem.

5. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 29–32.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?⁶

The first part of the poem depicts the disintegration of Western civilization in unforgettable terms. But within the poem this lays the ground for the second, and arguably more significant, part. Given the problems, what is likely to happen? Yeats invokes a basic religious move (“Surely some revelation is at hand”). Indeed, he invokes specifically Christian categories so as to imagine that such a fraught world situation would be ripe for the return of Christ (“Surely the Second Coming is at hand”). But this thought does not direct him to the NT or Christian tradition but rather conjures for him a deeply disturbing image of a sphinx in slow motion, an image without hope or joy (“A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun”). When the image fades, all that remains is a grim conviction and an unhelpful expectation. The conviction is the baleful effect of two millennia of Christianity (“twenty centuries of stony sleep / Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle”); the expectation is that something else akin to Christianity is probably coming along to take its place (“And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”). This rough beast will no doubt be welcomed as a solution to the world’s problems. But for

6. The poem is available in any edition of Yeats’s poetry, and in numerous anthologies of modern poetry. I am using Helen Gardner, ed., *The New Oxford Book of English Verse* (London: Book Club Associates, 1973), 820–21.

Yeats himself, it would appear that this is no real solution but only humanity's propensity yet again to be taken in by something impressive but not ultimately truthful or life-giving.

My question in terms of metalepsis is simple. Do those who cite the first part of the poem—usually some or all of lines 3–8—envisage and imply the second part? To be sure, sometimes they may do.⁷ Yet I would contend that many, perhaps most—and certainly I myself—who cite the first part do not envisage and imply the second part. They cite the first part for its matchless insight into, and expression of, deep and problematic characteristics of the modern world. That is, Yeats says what people want to say and says it so well that they can do no better than make his words their own.

It is interesting that Hays himself allusively cites these words of Yeats when he is trying to depict something of the ancient context in which to understand Jesus's words in John's Gospel about his being one with God and that nobody will be able to snatch his sheep away from him:

How can it be so? The history his people knew was one of failed promises, dashed hopes, ambiguity at best. The Davidic monarchy fell; the Maccabean revolution soured and lost its grip on power. If, as William Butler Yeats prophesied to a much later disillusioned generation, the center cannot hold—if all efforts at creating order collapse into compromise and betrayal, if we continue to walk in the shadow of death—how can Jesus presume to stand in the temple (a temple that was already in ruins by the time John wrote his Gospel) and promise that his sheep will never be snatched away by the blood-dimmed tide of history?

Such an extraordinary promise is valid if and only if Jesus' claim to be one with the Father is also true. (p. 320)

Here, Hays surely draws on Yeats because of the imaginative potency of his language, with no metaleptic implication of the remainder of the poem (to which he makes no further reference). In other words, one can cite and allude without metalepsis if that which is cited says resonantly what one wants to say, and if what follows the words cited speaks of something else.

In the light of this, I turn now to the well-known issue of the use of Ps 22 in the crucifixion narrative of Mark (and Matthew). The words and images of this psalm appear in a "cluster of intertextual references" not only in the narrator's depiction of the scene but also on the lips of Jesus himself. Hays sees this use of Ps 22 as a paradigmatic example of metalepsis:

It follows that we cannot stop reading the psalm with its opening cry, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark has signaled his readers

7. An interesting example to discuss would be the use of lines 3–8 in the final paragraph of Lord Clark's famous *Civilisation* (Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation* [London: BBC, 1969], 347), where the context is that of the future prospects for Western civilization.

that the *whole* psalm is to be read as a prefiguration of Jesus' destiny. Consequently, as Christian interpreters have long recognized, Jesus' dying cry of desperation evokes the full sweep of Psalm 22's movement from desolate lament and complaint . . . to passionate petition . . . to praise and thanksgiving. If we read to the end of the psalm, we find an affirmation of the Lord's universal dominion over the nations. . . and even, for the reader who knows Mark's full story, an adumbration of the resurrection in the glad affirmation that God "did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him (Ps 22:24–25).

What I am suggesting is that to read Jesus' cry from the cross in Mark 15:34 as an intertextual evocation of Psalm 22's promise of hope is not simply an exegetical cop-out, a failure of nerve that refuses to accept Mark's bleak portrait of Jesus' death at face value. Rather, *it is a reading strategy that Mark himself has taught us* through his repeated allusive references to snatches of Scripture that point beyond themselves to their own original narrative settings and lead the reader to reevaluate the surface sense of the Jesus story. (p. 85)

But here, the question of the possible limits to metalepsis must surely be raised. Psalm 22 is a psalm in two parts, parts of markedly distinct tone and content. The first part is an agonizing lament and complaint (22:1–21a), whereas the second part is a song of joyful thanksgiving and praise (22:21b–31). The Evangelist's allusions to the first part are entirely in keeping with the scenario of crucifixion. That is, the psalm so powerfully depicts a figure in desolation and anguish who is confronted by hostility and mockery that Mark has appropriated it to depict Jesus's dying. Nonetheless, we should recognize that *every* citation or allusion in Mark's crucifixion account relates *only* to the first part, and *no* reference is made to the second part. The words and content of the first part have strong resonance with the Markan portrayal of Jesus's crucifixion, whereas the words and content of the second part have no resonance whatever. A reasonable explanation would be that Mark alludes only to the first part because it is only the first part that depicts what he wants to depict. Hays, however, allows appeal to metalepsis to override these distinctions of content and appropriateness to context, without acknowledging any possible difficulty posed by the question of appropriate limits to intertextual allusion. But this means that it is unclear whether his argument here about "the *whole* psalm" being envisaged—rather than just *the whole of the psalm's first part*—is different from, or stronger than, an argument that an allusion to "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold," if made by someone who knows well the whole of Yeats's poem (as, I presume, does Hays himself!), should also be taken to point beyond itself to include allusion to some rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.

The kind of reservation I feel about Hays's appeal to Ps 22 surfaces elsewhere also. For example, Matthew accompanies his account of Herod's slaughter of the children of Bethlehem with a citation of Jer 31:15 that depicts Rachel weeping for her children (Matt 2:16–18). Hays initially offers a persuasive figural reading of Rachel: "Rachel, the wife of Jacob/Israel and therefore the figurative mother of the people as a whole, mourns proleptically from the past over the exile—and, by implication, over the repeating pattern of violence against God's chosen" (p. 115). He continues: "Indeed, to recall Jeremiah's prophecy is necessarily to recall also its wider context," that is, Jer 31:16–17, in which "Jeremiah's image of Rachel weeping is a prelude to his bold prophecy of hope for the end of exile," and he says that thereby Matthew "hints that in Jesus the restoration of Israel is at hand." He sees this not as a use of "random Old Testament prooftexts" but "rather, [Matthew] is thinking about the *specific shape* of Israel's story and linking Jesus' life with key passages that promise God's unbreakable redemptive love for his people." Indeed, "that is why Matthew comments on Herod's slaughter of children by selecting a citation from the same chapter in Jeremiah that also promises 'a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' (Jer 31:31). Matthew's reference to Rachel works as a metaleptic trope, recalling the wider context of Jeremiah's prophecy" (p. 116).

I confess that the confidence of Hays's metaleptic move, in which mention of Rachel "necessarily" recalls not just a promise of restoration from exile but also the famous promise of a new covenant, again leaves me asking questions. Even if Matthew overall may be "thinking about the *specific shape* of Israel's story," I do not see why that shape must be found in every biblical citation. Why should it not be possible that Matthew cites Jeremiah's depiction of Rachel weeping solely to enhance a picture of grief and desolation? It may be that he chooses Jeremiah's words not "randomly" but because they say so resonantly what he himself wants to say. The subject matter of Jer 31:15 is appropriate to Matthew's depicted context, whereas the subject matter of Jer 31:16–17 or 31:31 is not, for it is speaking of something different.

Another way of expressing some of my concern here is to observe that at least sometimes a proposed metaleptic move risks distracting the reader from attending to the actual content of what the text says. When Matthew cites Jeremiah's depiction of Rachel weeping, words about grief for dead children, then the reader needs in the first instance to think about, and perhaps imagine, anguished, indeed inconsolable, grief. To say that this picture should not be separated from what follows in the text of Jeremiah, either immediately in 31:16–17 or proximately in 31:31, risks prematurely directing the reader's attention to a different content. If the subject matter of the text is grief, so should be the focus of the reader. Throughout the prophetic literature of the OT, promises of hope tend not to be far away from oracles

of judgment or depictions of grief. But it surely remains important to hear each voice for itself, rather than to merge them too quickly.

In short, I am unpersuaded that all of Hays's proposed metalepses should be accepted as metalepsis. To be sure, arguments about the possible limits to metalepsis are rarely going to be straightforward, as judgments and perspectives differ: one reader's boundary limit may be another reader's beckoning frontier. But I have argued that, at least sometimes, there can be weighty differences of content and context between the wording of a cited text in itself and its wider literary context, and that these can restrict what is appropriate in terms of its imaginative echoing use. There can be good reasons to stay with what the cited words say and to refuse to find a metalepsis. Hays's main thesis about metalepsis in the Gospels is strong. It would surely be strengthened, rather than weakened, through engagement with the issue of possible limits to metalepsis and perhaps some reduction in the examples adduced.

An aside: in the discussion of Matt 2:16–18, and sometimes elsewhere, I find Hays's rhetoric ("is necessarily to recall") to be too strong, where a more cautious or heuristic formulation of his point might serve him better. Thus, for example: "These unforgettable metaphors [of judgment, in Jer 16:16–18; Amos 4:1–2] create the cultural and poetic tradition within which the phrase ἄλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων ('fishers of people') must be heard" (p. 25); "to say that Simeon was awaiting 'the παράκλησις of Israel' can mean only one thing: he was remembering Isaiah 40" (p. 217). These are indeed plausible, suggestive, and illuminating readings; but to use the language "must be heard" and "can mean only one thing" is surely to overstate. To me this occasional strong phraseology is the more grating because Hays generally has a fine range of terminology to express the subtlety of the allusive processes that he discerns: "these associations are perceptible only for readers with ears to hear"; "Luke does not directly quote the precursor text; rather, he subliminally evokes it, so that the reader who knows 1 Samuel will hear Mary [in the *Magnificat*] singing a harmonious descant to Hannah's song of praise"; "John's narrative keeps these reverberations at a very low volume" (pp. 50, 197, 340). At any rate, to me, the occasional uses of "necessarily," "must," and "only" do not simply say that the proposed resonances are stronger rather than weaker, but rather they suggest a hermeneutical dirigisme at odds with the poetic sensibility that is usually evident. Having said this, it may be that the problem is in part a cultural one, that someone on the other side of the pond, with a British predilection for understatement, simply does not hear all Hays's words in their intended idiomatic register.

READERS AND PRACTICES OF READING

Another way of coming at some of my questions about metalepsis is to reflect a little on the kind of readers and practices of reading that Hays's

proposal envisages. Hays is clear that readers need to learn to read in a particular way, to read with an “implicit cultural encyclopedia” (p. 324) in mind. On the one hand, he sees this as a concern for the Evangelists themselves in their ancient context. Thus, for example, he says of Luke:

The effect of this accumulation of scriptural imagery is to encourage the formation of a certain kind of reading community. Luke is *creating* readers, seeking to foster the intertextual competence necessary to appreciate the nuances of the sort of narrative he is spinning. He is not only encouraging his readers to have confident assurance (*ἀσφάλεια*) about the things they have been taught (Luke 1:4) but also teaching them who they are—the heirs of this story—and how they should therefore read. A story of such complexity and nuance helps to cultivate readers who read patiently, carefully, and subtly. (p. 276)

And because this reading—which must also often be understood as hearing—is demanding, it seems reasonable to conjecture that from early times appropriate help would have been provided: “It is probably right to see Luke’s Gospel as, *inter alia*, a teaching tool, a story crying out for commentary. The necessary instruction would have been provided by teachers in the early church who expounded the text for their communities of Gentile converts and explained some of its intertextual intricacies” (p. 276).

On the other hand, Hays sees this equally as a need for contemporary readers:

We should hear [the Gospels’] testimonies as four distinctive voices singing in *polyphony*. If that is correct, the art of reading the Gospels is like the art of listening to choral singing. Each section in a choir must learn to hear and sing its own part. The choir director does not want everyone gravitating to singing the melody in unison; if that happens, the polyphony and the harmonic texture will be lost. . . . To be sure, in a complex choral work, there may be moments of dissonance between the different parts. Discerning hearers do not want to eliminate the dissonances; rather, the task of appreciation is to develop a nuanced ability to hear how the dissonances belong to a larger artistic design. (p. 349)

The purpose of his book is to help toward this, over against the more narrow and historicizing approach to biblical texts that has generally characterized modern biblical scholarship, with its tendency to focus on meaning in context of origin and to set aside the intertextual dynamics of canonical (re)contextualization.

In general terms, this makes good sense, and I welcome it. But when specific examples of this kind of reading are examined, the picture sometimes becomes less straightforward. A question that I found myself asking more than once is: do actual readers read like this? For example, Hays finds multiple resonances with high theological intentionality in two of the

opening three verses of Mark's Gospel, where there is a compound scriptural citation not just from Isa 40:3, though Isaiah alone is specified, but also from Exod 23:20–22 and Mal 3:1–5. Hays comments:

By echoing this passage [Exod 23:20–22] Mark artfully hints that the Baptist is not only a voice of judgment (as the Malachi allusion would suggest) but also the forerunner of a new entry into the land of promise. . . . It also suggests, however, that the progress of the “gospel of God” into the world may be, like the occupation of Canaan, the beginning of a campaign against hostile forces now in possession of the land. . . .

Thus, in his abrupt and forceful opening, Mark quickly frames the events of his story with allusions to God's promise to lead Israel into the land (Exod 23), God's intention to send a messenger warning Israel of impending judgment (Mal 3), and God's comforting word that promises redemption and a new exodus (Isa 40). (p. 23)

Similar is Hays's discussion of Jesus's words in Luke 4:18–19 with their compound citation of Isa 61:1–2 and 58:6:

The density of intertextual interplay in this passage is characteristic of Luke. A single short scriptural quotation, placed on the lips of Jesus at a programmatically crucial moment in the narrative, evokes at least three layers of scriptural memory. . . . Israel's new exodus ending the Babylonian exile, the jubilee year commanded by Moses, and the first exodus out of Egypt. Readers formed within Israel's encyclopedia of reception will perceive that Luke's Jesus is announcing that the time has come for all three of these prototypes to be brought to fulfillment in their hearing. (p. 229)

The reader I know best is myself. Admittedly, I am only a partially formed reader as yet, and am still on the way. Nonetheless, in my reading of Hays's discussion in these two instances, I had the strange experience of feeling that the individual parts of the argument, each meticulous and lucid, were somehow more than the whole. In the light of the whole, when I turned to a subsequent fresh reading of these respective Gospel passages, I confess that my overall feeling was less “Aha! Now I see!” than a slightly anxious “Am I remembering and recognizing all the thematic resonances that I now know I should be finding here?” Maybe I will do better in future readings, when there has been more time to digest Hays's work and recognition of resonances may become more intuitive. But at least for now, in these particular instances, I feel a kind of mental overload in which I am as much distracted as helped in my reading of the biblical text.

A further question relates to Hays's resistance to finding the suffering servant of Isa 53 in the Markan and Matthean passion narratives, despite the regularity with which Christians have made this move. He argues this carefully, making his case in terms of the texts' production, the intrinsic

verbal texture of the Evangelists' respective narratives, as distinct from the texts' reception in which they have been read in a wider canonical context—where a reading in terms of Isa 53 is not theologically misguided, but “places the hermeneutical accents differently” from the Evangelists' own concerns (pp. 87, 162). This sort of argument seems to be important for maintaining scholarly discipline and rigor in discussions of intertextuality, rather than opening the gates to “anything goes.” In more technical terms, Hays in his reading of the Gospels seems consistently to privilege an author-cum-text hermeneutic (“this is the determinate sense and implication of the text as formed by the evangelist”) over a text-cum-reader hermeneutic (“this is a realization of the text's semantic potential that a reader who is alert to the wider canonical context may reasonably find there”).

Hays of course recognizes that “the meaning of a text cannot be strictly delimited by the original intention of the author” and “precisely because the text participates in an intertextual field and activates different encyclopedias of reception in different reading communities, there is always the possibility of a fresh reading that discloses layers of significance of which the author was unaware” (p. 136). But in terms of Hays's handling of the Gospels themselves, this remains a road less traveled.⁸ To be sure, once Hays toys with a possible reading that “goes far beyond anything that can be ascribed with any degree of confidence to Luke's authorial intention,” and he acknowledges the possibility of “experimental intertextuality” which involves “the juxtaposition of texts not obviously or traditionally linked in order to discern new and unexpected senses”; but he seems nervous about going very far with this, and designates it only as a “poetic thought experiment” and a “perhaps fanciful intertextual reading” (pp. 242–43).⁹

At least two questions, however, come to mind. First, what if Christian readers should wish to read the Gospels in some way analogously to the way Hays argues that the Evangelists read, and that contemporary Christians should continue to read, the OT? If Israel's Scriptures are to be read not only in their ancient pre-Christian contexts of meaning (an approach Hays continues to affirm) but also in poetically imaginative ways, why not the Gospels also? Hays, in keeping with the characteristic approach and insights of modern biblical scholarship, keeps a clear focus on the distinctive voices of the respective Evangelists in their ancient context, so that each can be heard in its own right; and this is highly fruitful. But he does not ask the question about readers reading the Gospels in synthetic and

8. In Hays's *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 14–33, there is perhaps a stronger emphasis on the interplay between production and reception as integral to intertextual reading.

9. Hays derives this concept of “experimental intertextuality” from Stefan Alkier, whose account of intertextuality he commends (367 n. 3, 242, 418 n. 101): “Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts,” in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy Huizenga (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 3–21. Interestingly, Alkier himself seems happier to explore an experimental option than does Hays.

poetic ways analogous to the rereading of Israel's Scriptures as the OT—even if figuration with reference to Jesus would no longer be needed when Jesus himself is specifically in focus. If one can legitimately read Israel's Scriptures in a mode that “places the hermeneutical accents differently” from their writers' own concerns, why not the Gospels also? Would this be legitimate? If so, what would, and would not, follow? If not, why not? It is well-known, for example, in text-critical terms that a synthetic reading of the Gospels was practiced from an early date, for this affected the manuscripts in a way that was only disentangled and set aside in the 19th century. What, if any, might be the contemporary hermeneutical implications of imaginative synthesizing moves, not only in text-critical but also (and more importantly) in broad interpretive terms?

Second, and related, Hays depicts the distinctive Johannine approach to the OT as “more visual than auditory” and as seeing the OT as “a vast matrix of symbols prefiguring Jesus” (pp. 284, 343). What, then, if Christian readers approach the Synoptics in a Johannine mode? Does not the image of an anguished yet faithful figure in Isa 53 lend itself to being an imaginatively potent picture of Jesus in his passion? Even if Mark and Matthew did not so envisage Jesus, why should not Christians read their narratives with this visual symbol in mind?

The issues here are complex and defy easy exposition, never mind resolution. But Hays's at-least-initial resistance toward utilizing the servant of Isa 53 for a reading of Mark and Matthew seems to me to raise nicely the wider question whether, by analogy with the proposed approach to the OT, the Gospels themselves might not be read in more than one way, with a possible different hermeneutical accent to that of the Evangelists and consequent sitting light to authorial intention, and what might follow from this.

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPELS

Finally, I would like briefly to say something both about the OT and about possible implications of its use in relation to Hays's constructive Christological proposals. My first question relates to the relative significance of the differing ways of reading the OT: the figural (re)reading of the Evangelists, and the typical scholarly focus on meaning in context of origin. Hays explicitly asks: “What sort of hermeneutical landscape might open before us if we learned to read Israel's Scripture not only through the filtering lenses of modern critical methods but also through the eyes of John and the other authors of the canonical Gospels?” And he glosses this sentence in a footnote: “The reader should take careful note of the construction of this sentence: ‘not only . . . but also’. I am proposing not the rejection of modern critical readings but a corrective and enrichment” (pp. 347, 439 n. 1). This is fine. But Hays only discusses the implications of

figural reading. Although he targets a “rationalistic criticism” that would fundamentally resist a figural reading of Israel’s Scriptures (p. 359), he does not ask what might be the contribution of a nonrationalistic, historically oriented reading of the OT, or how it might best coexist with a figural approach, or when one might be more appropriate for a reader than the other. (This is more an observation than a criticism, as he cannot do everything within one already-sizeable book.)

One brief remark: It is indeed a distinctive challenge of our “post-modern” context that we need to learn to read Israel’s Scripture in two ways—both the “premodern” way of reading it in the light of the NT, and the “modern” way of reading it “on its own terms” (if such simplifying categories may be permitted heuristically). The challenge is the more pressing if, like myself, one is persuaded both by Hays’s arguments for a “postmodern” reworking and reappropriation of the “premodern” and by the insights arising from mainstream “modern” biblical scholarship. Nonetheless, my overall impression from reading *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* is that the witness of the OT, while resonant and suggestive in numerous ways as Hays proposes, is yet somewhat muted in comparison with what can be gained by attending to its distinctive voice(s) as articulated with the insights of biblical scholarship: say, the wonder and challenge of election, the existential space afforded by lament, the searing critique of religious language and practice that has become divorced from integrity and justice. Of course, as an OT specialist I would say this! But my concern is not a territorial dispute between OT and NT specialists. Rather, I would simply urge that, even if we are fully persuaded as to the value of a figural (re)reading of the OT, we do not lose sight of the theological value of other more historically oriented reading strategies—even if for the present we leave open how both approaches may best be learned and practiced together, especially in ecclesial contexts.

My second question relates to the importance of some of the theological categories of Israel’s Scriptures when read in a pre-Christian frame of reference and the difference these might make to Hays’s readings of the Gospels. Does Hays give sufficient attention to the OT’s narrating of God’s action in the world? Let me give some examples of arguments that gave me some unease in the course of my reading.

Hays sees an important Christological clue in Mark’s use of Dan 7 with reference to Jesus:

If Jesus is identified, through Mark’s references to Daniel 7, as the eschatological Son of Man enthroned in heavenly glory, the question inevitably arises of how to understand his relation to the “Ancient One”, the God of Israel. If Israel’s God is a jealous God who brooks no other gods before his face. . . , who then is this figure who exercises everlasting dominion, with whom the heavenly throne room is to be

shared? In light of Jesus' breathtaking self-disclosure in the trial scene (Mark 14:62), we are compelled to remember and reread the whole story to see whether there are further clues to Jesus' identity that we might have missed along the way.

And upon rereading, we discover numerous passages scattered through this Gospel that offer intimations of a disturbing truth—*Jesus' identity with the one God of Israel*. (p. 62)

Hays seems to imply that the presence of a figure exercising everlasting dominion in the presence of a jealous God who brooks no other gods before his face raises a pressing question about the identity of Jesus. But why does the use of the scenario of Dan 7 with reference to Jesus raise theological implications other than those already present in Dan 7 in itself? In the context of Dan 7 the answer to "who then is this figure . . . ?" is, of course, Israel, as Hays himself fully recognizes (p. 34). The God of Israel vindicates his chosen people, who are given a position of honor in his presence. Thus, even if Jesus's self-identification as the Son of Man in Dan 7 raises searching questions about how he relates to Israel, it surely no more implies Jesus's "identity with the one God of Israel" than it does Israel's.

A recurrent factor in the Gospels to which Hays draws attention is the oscillation between God and Jesus as the subject of actions or the object of people's responses. For example, Hays heads his discussion of Mark 11:12–14 with the question, "Who comes looking for figs on the fig tree?" Behind the Gospel passage, he sees Jer 8:13, where God wants to gather grapes and figs. On the basis of this he observes:

It is *God* who is represented as seeking unsuccessfully to gather grapes and figs. What, then, are we to think when Mark tells the ominous and obviously symbolic story of *Jesus'* fruitless search for figs on the fig tree, followed by the withering of the tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21)? What does this suggest about the identity of the one who searches for the fruit? This is yet another case in which Jesus steps, at least functionally, into a role given exclusively to the LORD God in the Old Testament. . . . [Cumulatively, in terms of Hays's argument] the conjunction of Mark 11:12–14 with Jeremiah 8:13 points subtly but inexorably toward the identity of Jesus with the LORD in whose name Jeremiah spoke. As before, however, this mysterious identity is suggested through narrative figuration rather than asserted by means of direct statement. (p. 76)

Comparably, Hays finds Christological significance in similar language in the context of Luke's Gospel. For example, although Jesus instructs the healed demoniac to say how much *God* has done for him, he in fact proclaims what *Jesus* had done for him (Luke 8:39). Or when one of the 10 healed lepers returns to thank *Jesus*, Jesus muses on why only one gives glory to *God* (17:17–18). Although Hays recognizes that "taken by them-

selves, these examples do not prove anything about Jesus's direct identity with God," nonetheless, in the context of his wider argument, "they are suggestive that something more is here than might meet the eye on a first reading" (p. 257).

My reservations here relate to the fact that these narrative portrayals of the divine in the human are common in the OT. A paradigmatic example is in the story of the burning bush where God initially says to Moses that, in the light of Israel's sufferings in Egypt, "I have come down to deliver them," but then instantly follows this with saying to Moses that, because of Israel's being oppressed, "I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt" (Exod 3:7–10). The fact that Moses is to act on behalf of the Lord does not make what will happen any less the role and action of the Lord (as famously in the Decalogue, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt"). Nonetheless, the Exodus text does not suggest a "mysterious identity" between the Lord and Moses, or hint at Moses's "direct identity with God." For if there is "something more than might meet the eye on a first reading" it is surely the rich conceptuality of prophecy, whereby human words and deeds can be commissioned by God and used by God to become also God's words and deeds.

Comparably, Hays says of Jesus's lament over Jerusalem in Luke 13:34: "Who then should we understand to be the speaker in Luke 13:34? These daring words can hardly be merely the complaint of a rejected prophet. They are nothing other than a cry from the heart of Israel's God" (p. 261). But I am again nervous, for this prophetic speech is common in the OT. Jeremiah—whose whole book is introduced with the striking human/divine juxtaposition of "the words of Jeremiah . . . to whom the word of the LORD came" (Jer 1:1–2)—more than once expresses anguished laments in which his own voice is effectively identified with the divine voice (e.g., 8:18–9:1). Part of the problem may lie in Hays's use of *merely*. For this *merely* seems to be targeting a secularized and reductive reading of prophetic language, which sees supposedly prophetic language as intrinsically incapable of conveying a word from God, so that it is "merely" human. But someone who inhabits the conceptual world of biblical prophecy might be less inclined to use such a "merely" and instead prefer a "not only . . . but also": not only the complaint of a rejected prophet but also a cry from the heart of God.

My concern is that in all the Gospels Jesus is regularly characterized with the implicit conceptuality of OT prophecy in which there is understood to be a real, narratively portrayed albeit conceptually unexplained, coincidence of the human and the divine. Because Hays does not himself ask about or examine the theological conceptualities of OT prophecy, there are certain instances where he finds apparently unprecedented Christological implications in language and narration that are in fact well preceded in Israel's Scriptures. The "mind-bending claim that God is mysteriously but directly present in the figure of Jesus" (p. 75) is indeed mind-bending

to a secularist who cannot conceive of the divine presence in the human realm. But the contemporary theological challenge posed by many of these passages is surely not, in the first instance, to articulate a particular Christology of Jesus as the unique embodiment of God, important though that is. Rather, it is to be able to articulate how the human qua human can become the bearer and channel of the divine.

There is perhaps an analogy here with the traditional theological distinction between the divinity of the Son and the “divinization” of those adopted children of God who believe in him—an old issue that has had a new lease of life in some recent NT scholarship. On the one hand, it is important to maintain the distinctiveness of Jesus: who he is, and what he does, as a unique and definitive self-revelation of the one God who brings salvation and life to the world through Jesus’s death and resurrection. On the other hand, it is important to maintain the similarities and continuities between Jesus and his disciples, who are to enter into the life of Christ and become like him in thought and deed, and who are to allow death and resurrection to become a dominant metaphor for their own lives. It is often difficult to draw a clear line between these, however much the basic distinction is clear. For present purposes, my argument is that the OT’s characteristic portrayal of humans as bearers of God’s word and action, when located in a Christian discussion of divinity and divinization, falls on the side of divinization rather than divinity.

To say all this is *not* to argue that Jesus in the Gospels is portrayed “only” as a prophet, as in certain familiar arguments for “low” Christology, for I do not disagree that the Gospel portrayals, both individually and cumulatively, show Jesus as “more” than a prophet. One striking paradox is that John’s Gospel, which speaks most explicitly of incarnation, also most extensively uses the characteristic prophetic terminology of Jesus as “sent” by the Father. My concern is solely that some of the Gospel passages that Hays adduces as exemplifying a narratively articulated divine identity of Jesus do not seem to me to be best read as carrying all the specific implications that he finds in them.

CONCLUSION

It is a problem with an essay such as this that a concentration on issues of query and possible disagreement can give a seriously misleading impression of my estimation of Hays’s book overall. So I would reiterate, in conclusion, that my hope is not to undermine but to strengthen Hays’s thesis. My proposed prunings of some of his arguments may fail to do full justice to Hays, and for one reason or other may not commend themselves either to him or to others. I offer them as initial reader responses on the part of a critical friend/friendly critic. On any reckoning, however, Hays has made a major contribution to the better understanding of the Christian Bible with the Gospel portrayals of Jesus at its heart.