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0521772222 - The Bible, Theology and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus

R. W. L. Moberly

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The Bible, Theology, and Faith

A Study of Abraham and Jesus

How can academic biblical interpretation fruitfully contribute to Christian belief and living in today's world? This book offers a synthesis of some of the best in pre-modern, modern, and post-modern approaches to biblical interpretation, and locates the discipline within a self-critical trinitarian rule of faith, where historical criticism, systematic theology, ethics, and spirituality are constructively combined.

R. W. L. Moberly reclaims biblical and patristic principles of what is necessary for meaningful and truthful speech about God to be possible; he engages with contemporary ideological suspicions directed both to scripture and to its interpreters; and he offers an account of God and humanity in relation to both Old and New Testaments. Hermeneutical theory is given practical shape in in-depth studies of Genesis 22 ('The Akedah'), the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24), and the christology of Matthew's Gospel, studies which should be of interest to both Jews and Christians.

R. W. L. MOBERLY is Lecturer in Theology at the University of Durham. Author of *At the Mountain of God* (1983), *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (1992), *From Eden to Golgotha: Essays in Biblical Theology* (1992), and *Genesis 12–50* (1992), he has been an Anglican priest since 1982.

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[More information](#)

To *Patricia*
Dorothy and Ken
Fiona and Stephen
Johanna and Alan
Karen and Andrew
Sally and David

in lasting gratitude

Contents

Preface xi

1 The Bible, the question of God, and Christian faith 1
2 Christ as the key to scripture: the journey to Emmaus 45
3 Abraham and God in Genesis 22 71
4 Ancient and modern interpretations of Genesis 22 132
5 Genesis 22 and the hermeneutics of suspicion 162
6 Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as Son of God 184
7 Summary and prospect 225

References 243

Index of scriptural references 251

Index of names 259

Index of subjects 262

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book has grown in an often fragmentary and not very well-planned way, with vision usually only clear in retrospect not prospect. Although I hope that the final product has achieved coherence in such a way as to render unimportant the convoluted processes of its growth, a scholar trained in pentateuchal criticism never feels entirely confident about such matters. But while my earlier recensions may safely be relegated to oblivion, I wish to record with gratitude my indebtedness to at least some of the many formative influences on the various stages of my work, without whom it would not have become what, for better or worse, it now is.

The Theology Department of Durham University, superbly located in Abbey House, continues to be a most congenial context for work. I am able both to savour the views of Palace Green and the cathedral, and still attend sufficiently to my computer screen. A relaxed and supportive atmosphere lends itself to good conversations over coffee or lunch or *en passant* on the staircase. I am enriched by being here.

A preliminary first draft of the whole was read through by Stephen Barton, Chris Seitz, and Dan Hardy, who offered the kind of constructive criticisms for which every writer hopes; Stephen in particular has been an invaluable conversation partner and has contributed immeasurably to the development of my thinking. Particular chapters received valuable comment both from colleagues, Kingsley Barrett, Jimmy Dunn, Loren Stuckenbruck, Francis Watson, and Tom Wright, and from two of the best of my Biblical Theology students, Geoff Burn, and Lynda Gough. The Durham Old Testament and New Testament postgraduate seminars patiently sat through much of the material (at times feeling slightly bemused?) and made many a sharp contribution. Colleagues in the Scripture Project at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, have mulled

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over much of the material and given me a clearer sense both of its strengths and of its shortcomings.

I am increasingly aware, however, that many of the essays and books which have most influenced me are not mentioned in these pages at all, or are only mentioned in a cursory way disproportionate to their real significance; and likewise with numerous conversations along the way. I hope that some of my friends and also others may recognize their traces in my thinking and writing, and know that their influence has been so profound that it is a part of me and I can no longer separate it out.

I am grateful to Dan Hardy for suggesting Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine as a suitable location for my manuscript. Kevin Taylor at Cambridge University Press has always been helpful. Even his insistence that the manuscript be shortened, which I received with less than enthusiasm, was appropriate; despite my mutterings (and the loss of much footnote engagement with recent scholarly debate) I have to admit that the final version (whatever its defects) is an improvement on its predecessor. It has been a pleasure to work with Jan Chapman as copy-editor. And I am grateful to Nathan Macdonald for compiling the indices.

Although my thinking about the issues of this book has been going on for many years, the actual research and writing has taken place in a time of acute personal difficulty – in the aftermath of the death by cancer of my beloved Meredith on 7 July 1994, 114 days after she gave birth to John-Paul. My incapacity through grief, together with the exacerbation of my long-running M.E., could have rendered my personal and professional life unfruitful for a long time. But in addition to the wonderful support from my colleagues at Abbey House, the critical difference was made by those friends who were willing to help with the overnight and weekend care of John-Paul and who became a support system for both him and me. Their steady friendship and practical care channelled hope and healing in the valley of the shadow, and continued throughout the time in which this book was written – until the advent of Jenny last autumn brought new wonder and joy. It is to these friends that the book is dedicated, as a small token of a gratitude I cannot sufficiently express.