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Go Figure!

Figuration in Biblical Interpretation

Edited by

STANLEY D. WALTERS

GO FIGURE!

Figuration in Biblical Interpretation

Princeton Theological Monograph Series 81

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From Keble to Gore

A Study of the Use of Scripture in the Oxford Movement and by the Lux Mundi Group

C. Brad Faught

THE HISTORY OF THE OXFORD MOVEMENT AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, that of what is often seen as its successor, the *Lux Mundi* group, is well-ploughed ground. According to the most comprehensive bibliography of the former, for instance, something on the order of 7000 books and articles have been published on the subject.¹ Lest any reader think making this point intends a criticism of the apparent ubiquity of works on the Oxford Movement, the present writer too has contributed to this vast corpus.² Interestingly, however, while much has been written about its leading personalities and the intensity of the controversies they provoked, very little work has been done on the way in which the Oxford men—the Tractarians as they were called once the *Tracts for the Times* gained wide circulation in the early 1830s—viewed and handled Scripture. Of course, cardinal to Tractarian thinking was the exalted place of the church, a readily acknowledged elevated ecclesiology, which might at first glance suggest that the Tractarians were not much interested in taking a party stand over the use of Scripture, conceding such to the Evangelicals for whom it occupied an understandably preeminent place in their thinking.³ But, it may

1. Lawrence N. Crumb, editor, *The Oxford Movement and Its Leaders: A Bibliography of Secondary and Lesser Primary Sources*. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1988). A supplement was published in 1993.

2. C. Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

3. See Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology, 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979).

be argued, the Tractarian view of Scripture was of vital importance to the development of the Movement and in the hands of John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey, and John Keble especially an identifiable position can be discerned, which in this essay shall then be compared to that held by the Lux Mundi group, specifically its leading light, Charles Gore.

Let us begin not with Newman, however, as most studies of the Oxford Movement do, but rather with Pusey, the so-called 'hermit' of Christ Church. This sobriquet was given to Pusey in the 1840s when the early death of his wife and the controversies of the Oxford Movement had weighed on him heavily, consolidating an earlier move by him to live a semi-secluded life in Tom Quad. Twenty years before, however, he had been anything but hermetic; in fact, his later reputation as an arch-conservative and ritualist (the latter being something of a caricature) is belied by his studies in the academic groves of German higher criticism as a young biblical scholar in the 1820s.

As Colin Matthew points out in an article whose title captures accurately his too-critical view of Pusey, "Edward Bouverie Pusey: From Scholar to Tractarian," Oxford's future Regius Professor of Hebrew started in a much different place theologically than where he finished.⁴ Beginning in 1825, Pusey spent the better part of two years in Germany, the result of which was the writing of the most important theological work of his youth. Called a *Historical enquiry into the probable causes of the rationalist character lately predominant in the Theology of Germany* (1828), it comprised a wide-ranging attempt to come to grips with the "work of the chief German universities"; that is, with what today is called historical-critical studies of the Bible.⁵

Pusey's apparent acceptance of some features of new-style Biblical criticism was short-lived, however. Upon his book's publication it was met with unfavorable reviews, especially that by Hugh James Rose, a future Tractarian, who charged Pusey with rationalism and a low view of the apostolic succession.⁶ These criticisms were enough, it seems, to compel Pusey to back away from his German-inspired ruminations and return to the safer confines of the high churchmanship and the traditional view of

4. H. C. G. Matthew, "Edward Bouverie Pusey: From Scholar to Tractarian," *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1981) 101-24.

5. *Ibid.*, 106. See, also, David Forrester, *Young Doctor Pusey: A Study in Development* (London: Mowbray, 1989) chap. 2.

6. Matthew, "Edward Bouverie Pusey, 111.

Scripture in which he had been born and bred. It was from this position in the early-mid 1830s, therefore, that Pusey chose to make common cause with the men of the nascent Oxford Movement.

Meanwhile, someone for whom Germany could never conceivably be attractive, John Keble, had quit Oxford altogether. After an impressive undergraduate career capped by a double first in mathematics and classics, he remained in Oxford as a fellow of and later tutor at Oriel College. But the hurly-burly of Oriel intellectual life, spearheaded by a group of self-consciously progressive dons nicknamed the Noetics, was completely unappealing to the retiring Keble and so he left the ancient university city in order to take up the duties of a rural parish priest. Reluctantly, he did allow himself to be elected Oxford's Professor of Poetry, a non-resident position, in 1831. But the conclusion of its five-year term coincided with his being instituted to the living of Hursley in Hampshire in 1836. And in these salubrious surroundings he remained until his death thirty years later in 1866, far from the Oriel Common Room that, according to Newman, had "stank with logic."⁷

That leaves Newman. While Keble and Pusey were shaped by rural high churchmanship—in the latter's case by his aristocratic social standing too⁸—Newman's upbringing was urban (London) and evangelical. His conversion experience as a fifteen-year-old schoolboy left a deep impression on him.⁹ But his years at Oxford as both undergraduate and Oriel fellow began a spiritual journey that of course led to his embracing Roman Catholicism in 1845. By that time leadership of the Oxford Movement had passed already to Pusey who, despite his own reservations, would be synonymous with Anglo-Catholicism for the balance of the nineteenth century. By that time too, a Tractarian view of Scripture had become well established. What was that view, and how did it change in the hands of Charles Gore some half-century later?

Here, Keble and Pusey are most important, partly because of their own essential connection to the establishmentarianism of the Church of England, and partly because of Newman's singular spiritual and theological odyssey culminating in his departure for Rome. Keble was the epitome

7. John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 11.

8. See Faught, *The Oxford Movement*, 106–7.

9. See Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and His Age*. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990) chap. 2.

of the anti-modernist, and in this respect at least was the antithesis of the early Pusey. As noted above, Keble had already left Oxford, doing so in 1823. His subsequent priestly ministry was almost entirely pastoral in vocational terms and this of course meant the preaching of hundreds of sermons to rural parishioners, a group who could not have been less informed or less concerned about the emergent controversies over the study of the Scriptures, emanating mainly as they were still from Germany. Keble, while keenly intelligent and entirely capable of an academic defense of the so-called “old fashioned” style of scriptural interpretation, was at pains to stay clear of it when preaching to his rural flock at Hursley. Of course that should not surprise anyone, but perhaps it does, because the Oxford Movement is invariably thought of as a passionate campaign replete with controversy. Such, however, was never to Keble’s taste, a priest whose fundamental conviction was that the pulpit should not be used for polemical purposes, even less for displays of eloquence. Apparently, so dismayed was Keble over being told that he had preached a very fine sermon one week, that he intentionally preached a badly organized one the next.¹⁰

For “Gentle John” Keble, his view of Scripture was inherited mainly from his saintly father, also in Anglican holy orders, and from study of the Church Fathers, exemplified most clearly in his editing—along with Newman and Pusey—of *The Library of the Fathers* in the 1830s. The patristic figurative technique of typology made plain in the series—broadly defined as the method of interpreting scripture that sees in the Old Testament “types” that point toward Christ incarnate in the New—was under attack by the German school and the Tractarians, as one part of their counterattack against the so-called tenor of the times, responded to it with vigor.

Keble’s own response to what he termed the “fashionable liberality” of the day came in various forms.¹¹ His July 1833 sermon on “National Apostasy,” which has come to symbolize the beginning of the Oxford Movement, is his most famous broadside against a multi-lateral modernism, particularly as reflected in Church-State relations. Preached from the pulpit of St. Mary the Virgin, the University Church in Oxford, it was both a lamentation and a call to action. But from his own simpler pulpit

10. Charles S. Dessain, editor, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) 27:371.

11. John Keble, *Sermons for the Christian Year*, edited by Maria Poggi Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 2.

in Hursley Church, week in and week out, a quieter voice was heard. Keble sought to impress upon his local parishioners, a group made up of tradesmen, farmers, laborers, farm wives, and children, the traditional typological meaning of Scripture. For example, "what I mean by a 'type of the Cross,'" he told his congregation one Sunday morning, "I mean some person or thing, so described in the Old Testament that the faithful people of God, when they should read or hear of it long afterwards, might be put in mind of the Cross."¹²

In more sophisticated terms, Keble made the same point in perhaps his most important contribution to the *Tracts for the Times*. His Tract 89, the penultimate number in the series, was published in 1840, just a year before the Bishop of Oxford, Richard Bagot, asked that the controversial series cease publication owing ultimately to Newman's explosive Tract 90 on whether or not the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles could bear a Catholic interpretation. "On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church," is a tract in which Keble is keen to refute the new-style Biblical criticism. In it he champions patristic Scriptural exegesis, citing Origen in particular, arguing that its typological and spiritual elements do not eclipse or interfere with the literal sense.¹³

Keble's steady defense of traditional methods of scriptural interpretation were of a piece with his endorsement of the religious establishment and of broader Tory political principles altogether. Within the Oxford Movement itself, Keble acted as a kind of lighthouse figure, guiding those who were otherwise unsure of which direction to take. As it was remarked of him by Pusey's biographer and spiritual heir, Henry Parry Liddon: "when all else had been said and done, people would wait and see what came from Hursley before they made up their minds as to the path of duty."¹⁴ One of those of course who looked to Keble for spiritual direction was Pusey himself, whose initial encounter with historical-critical methods had been tested and rejected and in 1834 he made common cause with the Tractarians by contributing his first effort to the *Tracts for the Times*,

12. Quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

13. [John Keble], "On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church," *Tracts for the Times*, No. 89 (Oxford: James Parker, 1868). See, also, Ephraim Radner, "The Discrepancies of Two Ages: Thoughts on Keble's 'Mysticism of the Fathers,'" *The Anglican* 43 (2000) 10–15.

14. Quoted in Georgina Battiscombe, *John Keble: A Study in Limitations* (London: Constable, 1963) xvi.

Tract 18 on fasting. As effectively leader of the Tractarians after about 1841, and of the Anglo-Catholics later on, Pusey's position in the roil of mid-Victorian debates over Christianity was never more central than in the question of Scriptural interpretation.¹⁵ In much of the history of the Victorian-era, questions of belief and unbelief predominate. But, as George P. Landow points out, "this focus has been particularly unfortunate since the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century saw a great, almost astonishing, revival of biblical typology, which left its firm impress upon Victorian literature, art, and thought."¹⁶ Landow's comment could send this study profitably into all sorts of directions, but what is of primary concern here is Pusey and Scripture. And one of his formal forays into the area came in a series of lectures he gave at Oxford in Michaelmas term 1836. Apparently, just twenty-nine people attended his "Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament," but among them were Newman and Isaac Williams, whose own position in the Oxford Movement was becoming increasingly important and who would provoke a firestorm of controversy over his position on the doctrine of reserve in communicating religious knowledge.¹⁷

Pusey's lectures were a culmination of a concentrated period of study and they were concerned primarily with forwarding the thesis that types, symbols, and sacramental actions carry within themselves the biblical revelation. Pusey's Old Testament exegesis is relentlessly christocentric.¹⁸ To Pusey, the Church Fathers, especially Origen, had read the Scriptures in "the apostolic mode . . . they had Christ always in their thoughts, and so with the full persuasion that the whole of the Old Testament, the law, the prophets and the psalms, before of him, they read and understood of Christ therein. . . ."¹⁹ This christology is consistent with the Tractarians' increasing emphasis on the incarnation and on Eucharistic fellowship, which

15. See Peter G. Cobb, "Leader of the Anglo-Catholics?" in *Pusey Rediscovered*, edited by Perry Butler (London: SPCK, 1983) 349–65.

16. George P. Landow, *Victorian Types Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 3.

17. See Faught, *The Oxford Movement*, 51. Also, [Isaac Williams], "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge," *Tracts for the Times*, No. 80 (London: Rivingtons, 1837).

18. David Jasper, "Pusey's 'Lectures on Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament,'" in *Pusey Rediscovered*, 51–70.

19. Quoted in *ibid.*, 64.

would become a defining feature of Pusey's thinking in the years ahead, and in a different way that of Charles Gore also.²⁰

Pusey's voice was a loud and insistent one in this regard in mid-Victorian society. As Oxford's Regius Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christ Church Cathedral, he could be counted upon to weigh into most religious controversies of the time. But on the issue of Scriptural interpretation none was more significant than that over the book of Daniel. In 1862–63, Pusey gave a series of nine lectures at Oxford, published the next year under the title, *Daniel the Prophet*. As he described it in the Preface, "the following lectures were planned, as my contribution against that tide of skepticism, which the publication of *Essays and Reviews* let loose upon the young and uninstructed."²¹ His reference of course is to the series of seven essays published in 1860, which formed the basis for a public "Liberal Protestant Christianity," as described by some. Coming just one year after the seismic publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, *Essays and Reviews* was the controversial work of six Church of England clergymen and one layman.²² Together, they sought to critique the whole of Christian theology and the Biblical record through the prized use of so-called "free inquiry." What Darwin had done for science, the "Seven Against Christ," as they were disparaged by their critics, would do for the Church of England, or so they thought.

Arguably, the most important of the seven essays, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," was that written by Benjamin Jowett. As master of Balliol College, Oxford, later in his career, Jowett saw himself as the creator of a generation of statesmen. And in shaping the early lives of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, and H. H. Asquith, Liberal prime minister, to name two noteworthy examples, he was not wrong. But in 1860 Jowett was just a don, albeit as Regius Professor of Greek, not an ordinary one. (He was also "monumentally rude": "What I don't know isn't knowledge" is the way a bit of undergraduate doggerel described his attitude.) In his essay, Jowett argued that the Bible ought to be read like any other book. The aim of its readers should be a recovery of the authors' original meaning within their own historical contexts. He implied that divine inspiration

20. See R. W. Franklin, "Pusey and Worship in Industrial Society," *Worship* 57 (1983) 386–412.

21. E. B. Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet: Nine Lectures*, 6th ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1880) iii.

22. See Victor Shea and William Whitla, editors, *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

had nothing to do with the creative process. He praised the “higher” critics, mostly German, who were seeking to confirm the events narrated in the Bible from independent sources.

Upon reading *Essays and Reviews* Pusey was quick to point out that nothing Jowett or any of his co-writers had said was new: “Human inventiveness in things spiritual or unspiritual is very limited. It would be difficult probably to invent a new heresy. Objectors of old were as acute or more acute than those now; so that the ground was well-nigh exhausted.”²³ But what was new—and shocking for many—was to have it said from within the Church of England itself. Accordingly, institutional reaction was swift. Led by Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Oxford, *Essays and Reviews* was condemned officially. Indeed, in 1862, two of its writers, Rowland Williams and H. B. Wilson, were indicted for heresy in ecclesiastical court, although later judgment against them was overturned by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Meanwhile, Pusey readied himself to enter the fray and did so in a concerted fashion with his lectures on the book of Daniel.

For Pusey, the Church’s foundational doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture was at stake in this controversy. As for the focus of his counterblast against those who would doubt the veracity of revealed religion, Pusey observes, “I selected the book of Daniel, because unbelieving critics [including Williams] considered their attacks upon it to be one of their greatest triumphs. . . . Only they mistook the result of unbelief for the victory of criticism. They overlooked the historical fact that the disbelief had been antecedent to the criticism.”²⁴ As Christopher Seitz holds, Pusey’s work on Daniel, that is, his defense of the traditional sixth-century authorship of it, displays a concern for “text, church and world,” every bit as acute as that found in what would later be called specialized “academic discourse.”²⁵

What of it? As noted earlier, Pusey’s Daniel lectures were delivered at Oxford in 1862 and 63. They focused upon the predictive character of the book and the harmony it displayed with the rest of Scripture. Pusey maintained that, given the familiarity with the customs and history of the time, the author must have lived during the period of its traditional sixth-century composition. Moreover, and against Daniel’s biblical critics, Pusey was certain that, as Henry Liddon, his biographer puts it, “the theology of

23. Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet*, iii.

24. *Ibid.*, vi.

25. Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 15.

Daniel was exactly what would be expected from a Jew living during the Babylonian captivity."²⁶

For Pusey, the Daniel lectures were a tour de force of biblical scholarship. They were thorough, replete with great erudition, and demonstrative of considerable linguistic skill and familiarity with Semitic literature. They were summative of forty years of work as a biblical critic and theologian, and they served a strongly polemical purpose as encapsulating the traditional conservative position on the inspiration of Scripture. They were also the last stand against Biblical higher criticism of the original Tractarians. Keble, looking on from Hursley and not far removed from his coming death in 1866, was equally wrought up by what *Essays and Reviews* represented. "I can compare it," he wrote in a letter to a friend in the fall of 1860, "to nothing but the reputed action of a rattle-snake; the sound of the rattle is heard and understood, and yet the fascination continues. . . ."²⁷ Pusey's own death would come in 1882. He remained the acknowledged leader of the Tractarians' heirs, the Anglo-Catholics, until the end, but his commitment to a traditional hermeneutic was one that many of his co-religionists simply could not accept. And chief among them was Charles Gore, at that time vice-principal of Cuddesdon Theological College near Oxford.

Born in 1853 in the leafy London suburb of Wimbledon, Gore, like Pusey before him, was the son of aristocratic privilege: both of his parents came from titled families. He was educated at Harrow and by the time he matriculated as a scholar at Balliol College, Oxford in 1871 his Anglo-Catholicism was assured. At Balliol, Gore came under the strong influence of Jowett, among others. A fellowship at Trinity College followed his first class degree in 1875. In that year too Gore and some likeminded young Anglo-Catholics founded what they informally called the "Holy Party," one of whose aims became the development of a liberal Catholicism in contradistinction to the Anglo-Catholicism represented by Pusey and the old Tractarian tradition. None of that, however, really came into sharp relief until long after Gore's ordination with, in 1889, the publication of *Lux Mundi*, a volume of twelve essays by a group of Anglican churchmen who, in their view, were offering a sympathetic engagement with contemporary thought. Gore was the book's editor. Earlier, in 1883, he had been appointed principal of Pusey House, the chief memorial to its recently

26. Henry Parry Liddon, *Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897) 4:72.

27. Quoted in Battiscombe, *John Keble*, 326.

deceased namesake and a place of Anglican learning, teaching, and pastoral care for Oxford undergraduates. But while pleased to undertake the appointment, Gore made it clear to Henry Liddon that he would not be adhering to every point of doctrine that had been upheld by Dr. Pusey.²⁸ That note of dissent, however, apparently was not understood.

What this admission ultimately meant was later revealed in Gore's essay in the *Lux Mundi* volume, "The Inspiration of Holy Scripture." The essay captured Gore's essential thinking on the hermeneutical problem first made plain in England by his sometime mentor Jowett in *Essays and Reviews* almost thirty years before. His main purpose in writing the essay, Gore states, is to meet the attack of Biblical criticism. To do so, he continues, "we are removing great obstacles from the path to belief of many who certainly wish to believe, and do not exhibit any undue skepticism."²⁹ To his critics, however, who emerged immediately, Gore had made a disastrous accommodation with Liberal Christianity. Liddon, in particular, was shocked. "*Lux Mundi*," he stated, "is a proclamation of revolt against the spirit and principles of Dr. Pusey and Mr. Keble."³⁰ Uproar within the Church of England ensued, the main point at issue being Gore's declaration that "it is the test of the church's legitimate tenure that she can encourage free enquiry into her title-deeds."³¹ Of course, controversy meant that the volume sold wildly: ten editions in the first year, three in one month alone, May of 1890. Gore had sent Liddon a copy in advance of publication in order to try and assuage what he assumed to be the coming criticism. But he did not retreat from his stated position, which in fact had been developing since the late 1870s, that "it is impossible in any way to withdraw the historical basis of Christianity from the freest and frankest criticism. If there exist persons who say, let the Old Testament be frankly criticized for it is not so important, but not the New Testament for it is vital, the claim must be utterly repudiated."³²

Gore's distinction here is suggestive of his critical approach to interpreting Scripture. In his *Lux Mundi* essay he was bold in his interpreta-

28. Liddon, *Life of Pusey*, 53.

29. Charles Gore, "The Inspiration of Holy Scripture," in *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, 15th ed. (London: Murray, 1909) 266.

30. Quoted in G. L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore* (London: Heinemann, 1935) 105.

31. Gore, *Lux Mundi*, 239.

32. Quoted in Paul Avis, *Gore: Construction and Conflict* (Worthing: Churchman, 1988) 43-44.

tion of the Old Testament, but not so in his handling of the New. This bifurcation troubled him for the remainder of his life, one that saw him become one of the most important figures in the Victorian and Edwardian Church of England as both bishop and theologian. It spoke to the teleology of his critical method; that is, can the progress of criticism, once begun, be brought appropriately to a close? His full endorsement of the critical method had, it is clear and despite his protestations, not encompassed the New Testament, and because of this inconsistency contemporary modernists were dismayed. No less dismayed, but for the opposite reason, are some biblical scholars of the present day who see in Gore "emerging the lineaments of a position on scripture completely twentieth century."³³ Where Pusey and Keble saw Scripture as a unity, where they recognized intertestamental congruence, Gore sees gradualness. That is, the Old Testament is by definition imperfect and is to be succeeded by the perfection of the New. Gore's undergraduate-taught Hegelianism is at work here, as is a controversial appeal to what he called "kenosis," which defined the Incarnation as a "self-emptying of God to reveal himself under conditions of human nature and from the human point of view," and to the Creeds.³⁴ This "Religion of the Incarnation," the stated theme of *Lux Mundi*, and which included the view that Jesus's knowledge was limited, then becomes the means by which the Old Testament and its attendant hermeneutical problems might be overcome.

Kenosis for Gore was problematical then and remains so now. As representative of a willingness to jettison the traditional idea of a single, unified Christian Scripture, to see, as he put it, "the Old Testament to be imperfect," he had indeed departed from the teachings of Pusey. Having done so, there was little hope that Anglo-Catholicism would not follow its new leader into the acceptance of a new Scriptural hermeneutic, ultimately much more in line with the writers of *Essays and Reviews* than with Pusey, Keble, and the old Tractarian tradition. Accordingly, and within a generation, such a transition had been made. It prevails still.

33. Seitz, *Figured Out*, 18.

34. Gore, *Lux Mundi*, 264.