

Monday, March 20, 2006

## Darrell Bock on Faith Based Scholarship

Once again we are graced with another outstanding evangelical NT scholar. Darrell Bock joins us and adds his distinctive voice to this discussion.



**(1) In what way does your faith enhance your scholarly investigation of the Bible? How does your research differ from that of mainstream critical biblical scholars? What are some of your guiding presuppositions? What are some of the potential strengths and weaknesses of a committed evangelical view of the Scriptures?**

I think my faith serves as a check against being too quick to think that passages are in contradiction or that an error is present in the text. We all know that different people see things slightly differently. In biblical scholarship this often results in quickly seeing a problem where a nuancing may be a better option in terms of the evidence. So I tend to ask if there is a way in which the materials can make sense with the premise that many of the writers of the NT were in contact with each other and shared a basic conviction about Jesus. This does not mean there cannot be nuance differences or differences of emphasis or development in thought. Everyone need not say the exact same thing. But the angle from which they consider it also must be taken into account. To keep this from being too abstract, let's take one often mentioned Paul versus James. My own take on Romans 4 versus James 2 is that Paul and James are asking distinct questions. Paul asks, "How does one get in?" He looks at the question of justification from its starting point. James 2 asks the same question, "How can one know one is in looking back?" In other words he asks from a different time frame. This produces the difference in their answer.

I would think that my research does not differ from a great deal of mainstream scholarship except for the likelihood that I have more room for divine action than some mainstream scholars. A methodological problem for all of us is what to do with claims of divine activity in our sources, especially when worldview presuppositions can control how such a question gets treated and answered. My own sense is that here is where much "parting of the ways" takes place.

I think the strength of an evangelical view of Scripture is that it operates with a tendency to seek a unity in the text and its perspectives. That strength can also be a weakness because it might see a tighter unity than may in fact exist. This is why the dialogue of the scholarly community can be helpful.

**(2) What are some of the potential strengths and weakness of secular biblical scholarship? What does the academy have to do with the church and vice versa? What is your advice to evangelical scholars regarding how one might interact with mainstream scholarship?**

Mainstream scholarship often shares the opposite problem. Its tendency to be skeptical of the

sources means that it often leaps to find tension where it may be more apparent than real. It also looks for analogy so quickly in other contexts that it often downplays differences between materials in related movements that can show uniqueness. I find it intriguing how some sources in some mainline discussions are embraced more readily than others simply because they are associated with the side that "did not win." That is not a scholarly standard. All sources need to count in our historical work, but we also need to recognize that sometimes it was more than "favorable circumstances" that gave one set of sources more impact than another.

My hope would be that the academy and the church would talk more. My sense is from students at many schools where mainstream methods are used is that they sense an effort by some professors to tear down their views. I think part of an education is doing a better job of presenting all sides of a case.

My advice is to simply do the best and most complete work you can. We all work with the same materials. Also recognize that the standard of being able to show something from ancient sources is a high one that also will certainly lead to some difference of opinion.

**(3) Who would you consider to be stellar examples of faith based evangelical scholarship and why? Who are some mainstream scholars that you respect and why?**

I think in Jesus studies there are several good examples: Howard Marshall, Craig Evans, Ben Witherington, Scot McKnight, and Tom Wright all do very careful work in this field. They know the sources and the context of the materials they work with. They move through a range of sources well. Martin Hengel is a good example of a mainstream scholar. Again, his knowledge of sources is extensive and he is not closed to dealing with the difficult question of divine activity. I could add to this list people like Richard Bauckham, Raymond Brown and John Meier. J. D. G. Dunn has a wonderful ability to address a question with clarity and get to the nub of a problem, asking the right kinds of questions.