in recent decades (the “Shouters,” the “Three-grades of Servants,” and the “Eastern Lighting Sect”) and explains the ambiguous role that millenarianism has played not only in these indigenous movements but also Chinese Christianity as a whole. He concludes that the church in China today is truly Chinese—in both positive and dubious ways—and that the long term trends for the development of the church appear to be positive.

Throughout the volume, Bays offers an even-handed, honest account and evaluation of the complex story of Chinese Christianity. While he is not afraid to broach tough topics, he deftly treats sensitive subjects with subtlety. For further study, he notes recent scholarship on a variety of topics and provides endnotes with suggested bibliographies at the end of each chapter. Most recent work on Chinese Christianity deals exclusively with either Protestantism or Catholicism, but Bays treats both in each time period and even includes an appendix on the Russian Orthodox Church. Having spent much time in China over the last thirty years, Bays adds a personal touch to his narrative by sharing some of his own experiences and thoughts on Chinese Christianity.

Bays’ highly readable book will no doubt quickly become a standard introduction for those approaching the subject of Chinese Christianity for the first time. It should also serve as a resource for scholars looking to review the larger story and as a stimulus for the next generation of scholars to explore some of the intriguing questions that he raises along the way.

Kurt Selles, Ph.D.
Director, The Global Center
Associate Professor of Divinity
Beeson Divinity School
Author of A New Way of Belonging: Covenant Theology, China, and the Christian Reformed Church, 1921-1951.

---

Reading Scripture with the Reformers
Timothy George
Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2011
270 pp. $16.00 paper

Reviewed by: Stefana Dan Laing

After a long and productive engagement with patristic biblical commentary in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, IVP has released a volume poised to introduce readers to the next logical step in Evangelical ressourcement: the era of the Protestant Reformers, and a new series, Reformation Commentary on Scripture. Timothy George’s readable volume accomplishes this introductory task with both a practiced historian’s narrative skill and a scholar’s keen historiographical insight. George is a solid Reformation scholar who has immersed himself in the dramatic events, personalities, issues, and theology of the 14th to 17th centuries for four decades.

George describes his volume as the “story . . . of how the Bible came to have a central role in the sixteenth-century movement for religious reform that we call the Protestant Reformation” (12). Although the Bible had acted as an agent of change in previous centuries as well, the sixteenth century gave its work additional impetus via two specific factors: Humanism, which produced a rich hermeneutical harvest by plumbing the depths of ancient literary sources; and the printing press, which produced “an explosion of knowledge, the expansion of literacy and a revolution in learning that touched every aspect of European civilization, not least the church” (61).

In the first chapter, George invites the reader to step into the Reformation world and identifies problems which might hinder
evangelicals (his primary audience) from doing so. This chapter is particularly hard-hitting as George goes up against the Goliath of historical-critical Bible scholars. Drawing on the work of David Steinmetz, George makes a plea for the validity and even superiority of pre-critical exegesis (28-30), advocating its vital contribution to the on-going exegetical task. In a rigorous and scathing critique of modernist biblical interpreters, George characterizes their attitude as an “imperialism of the present” or a “heresy of contemporaneity” (23). These phrases refer to the same phenomenon, as he explains: when we prioritize our own era’s way(s) of thinking, deciding, believing, and interpreting, we devalue the past, “including the ways earlier generations of believers have understood the Bible . . . The Christian past . . . becomes not . . . something to be studied” (and learned from), but rather “something to be ignored or overcome” (23). In a deft move, he levels the same accusation against “populist evangelicalism” and evangelical academics alike. A misappropriation of the Reformation principle of sola scriptura is to blame: “Evangelicals have paid too little attention to the sum total of the Christian heritage handed down from previous ages, including the practice of reading Scripture in the company of the whole people of God” (25), a critique which is later reinforced by George (120-24).

The second and third chapters treat the Humanist efforts to establish a text and a proper translation of the Scriptures, as well as the impact of the printing press in distributing various versions of the text. Chapter 4 focuses on Reformation era hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scriptural illumination. In chapters 5 and 6, Luther occupies pride of place, while other Reformation figures such as Melanchthon, Zwingli, and Calvin enter as their lives and work are intertwined with Luther’s. Chapter 7 attempts to unite various other contributors (Tyndale, Bucer, Zell, and Hubmaier) to the “story of the Bible in the age of the Reformation,” by moving from city to city along the Rhine River. Sustained focus on Calvin is relegated to almost the end of the book (chapter 8), his chief contribution being his homiletical style and approach (242-43). George highlights the inescapability of the interpretative labors of the Church Fathers when writing or speaking about the Reformers and Scripture. The theological giant Augustine and the linguistic powerhouse and translator of the Vulgate, Jerome, were front and center during the Reformation and Renaissance (77-85, and most of chapter 3).

Some readers may be dissatisfied with the comparatively little space devoted to Calvin and Zwingli. Other readers may see a thinly-veiled agenda in the focus on Scripture and tradition, where George lays out some keys to ecumenical dialogue, such as his own efforts in Evangelicals & Catholics Together discussions (120-24). The book’s stated intention to tell a “story” is ably fulfilled; consequently, the book lacks a driving, rigorously pursued thesis. While the book is an excellent introduction to IVP’s new series, it is also successful as a stand-alone volume, suitable for university or seminary-level church history surveys, Reformation electives, or hermeneutics classes.

Stefana Dan Laing, Ph.D.
Assistant Librarian
Harvard School for Theological Studies
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary