

victim of that violence can *both* be martyrs. Violent acts and media around Islamist terror in Egypt threaten to eclipse other definitions of martyrdom in such way that martyrs being killed for faith become invisible, as we focus on the killer and not the victim.

I.4: “The Collaborative Project on Scripturalization”

By: Daniel Patte

Tat-Siong Benny Liew asked us to address two questions: “Who or what do you want to watch as interpreter?” And “Who is watching you?” I had difficulty putting my mind around the second question until Benny rephrased it to encompass those to whom I address my interpretations: those for whom I am a watcher.

My answer to the first question was self-evident for me: I am watching interpreters of Scripture—in my case, interpreters of the Bible composed of many texts that Jews and Christians read as Scripture—i.e., those who are “scripturalizing” on the basis of these texts. More specifically, for the last 20 years or more, I focused my attention upon the interpretations of Paul’s letter to the Romans read as Scripture by Christian believers through the centuries and today across cultures, comparing them with recent (especially since World War II) interpretations of this letter by exegetes who read this letter critically, i.e., purposefully trying to avoid reading it as Scripture—even though, it turns out, these critical exegetes cannot avoid doing so by the very fact that the most detached readings are aimed at correcting the “wrong” (uncritical) scriptural readings by believers.

In retrospect, my answer to the second question should have been clear to me (although I could not formulate it on the spot): it is for the sake of all interpreters of the Jewish and Christian Bible as Scripture that I am presenting my interpretations of their interpretations of Scripture—and consequently for all interpreters who are scripturalizing (whatever might be the texts or traditions or cultural events which they scripturalize).

From the perspective of our common resource (*Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-modernity, and Intellectuals* by Zygmunt Bauman),¹ the interpreters I am studying are those who are “legislating” by developing an interpretation that

¹ Cambridge (UK): Polity and Basil Blackwell, 1987.

has authority—and explicitly or implicitly affect the life of the interpreters and those around them. In Vincent Wimbush's vocabulary, these legislators/interpreters can be viewed as *scripturalizers*. Of course, I am often functioning as a legislator/interpreter in many aspects of my life, including when I tell someone else my understanding/interpretation of a situation, of a book (Bauman's [!]; a novel I am reading), etc. But when I am *interpreting interpreters*, I am no longer legislating regarding the scripturalized text; I am no longer presenting an authoritative interpretation of a biblical text. I adopt a postmodern perspective, a meta-interpretive perspective showing how each scripturalizing process works.

Scripturalization is, by definition, a contextual process. It involves transforming a discourse into a system of signs with the authority and the power to frame the concrete lives of interpreters and their neighbors. Any discourse—be it a verbal, oral, visual, social, or cultural semiotic discourse—can be scripturalized, made into “Scripture,” as the Institute for Signifying Scriptures has repeatedly shown. And it is indeed essential to bring to light that this process of scripturalization is ongoing everywhere around us today, as the Institute does. Yet one should not forget that: (1) of course, this process is also ongoing around “what the West knows as Scripture,” and (2) that the work of the Institute prolongs the life-long work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, which was ultimately presented in his *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

In this book, Smith studies the “various ways in which different groups of people have developed a mode of living and of perceiving that as involved something that looks like what the West knows as Scripture” (196). This is a phenomenological study of the contextual way in which any given Scripture functions in the individual and community lives of believers. To make his point, Smith begins with a phenomenological study of the contextual role of Scripture in Islam, because at first it looks like the less contextual perspective—viewing the Qur’an as an immutable expression of the Word of God. But Smith’s study shows that “the Qur’an and various parts of it have meant different things to different Muslims” who live(d) in different cultural and religious contexts (in Arabia, Nigeria, Sumatra, northern India, Pakistan, of Western China) even as *each* interpretation claims that it presents the meaning for Muhammad (75). The Qur’an is functioning as Scripture for believers—the Qur’an is scripturalized—when today and through the ages it is for Muslim believers the Qur’an-to-live-by, that is, the Qur’an as it frames their lives in particular life-contexts. The Qur’an as Scripture is read by believers not so much for what it says in itself—for what was the actual meaning of it for

Muhammad as the presumed historical author—but what it says for their lives as believers, i.e. as the Qur'an-to-live-by.

Similarly, for the early rabbis and the Jews through the centuries, Torah was/is Scripture when it was/is viewed in its broader sense that includes the Oral Torah (*Torah she-be-ʿal-peh*) whose haggadic and halakic prolongations of the biblical text was viewed as given to Moses on Mount Sinai and thus as having comparable authority to the written Torah (*Torah she-bi-khtav*). Torah in this broader sense of Oral Torah is scripturalized to apply to the covenantal lives of the people of God in their different cultural and religious contexts – it is/was the Torah-to-live-by for Jews in these various contexts. Similarly, our study with 93 colleagues (church historians, theologians, and exegetes) of the receptions of Romans (including critical exegeses) showed that all these very different scripturalizations of this Christian Scripture were very different because, for better or for worse, there were *contextualized to their cores*—whether they originated from Alexandria in the second century, Antioch in the fourth century, Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries, Paris in the twelfth century, Wittenberg in the sixteenth century, in Germany, France, and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth century, in Romania in the twentieth century, in Latin America, in the Philippines, and in various places in Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.² This is also what Vincent Wimbush has shown in his recent publications, including in his *White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery*³ in which he presents a fascinating analysis of “the interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano.”⁴ In this volume, Wimbush shows how Equiano scripturalized his life—first in Africa, then as a slave and later as a free man in the North Atlantic—by reading his life in terms of the Bible. As Wimbush illustrates with this case, and as we found again and again regarding the receptions of Romans through history and in present-day cultures, the reading of a “scripture” (whatever it might be, oral or written) by “believers” (whatever might be their traditions, religious or otherwise) always involves reading one’s life in terms of this scripture. This is so because for “believers” a “scripture” is always read in quest for a Word-to-live-by, of course, in a particular concrete context. Studying a scriptural text (as I do these days with the Romans) cannot mean in any

² See the 10 volume book series *Romans through History and Cultures* (2000-2011, published by Trinity then T&T Clark). This series is the basis for my *Romans: Three Exegetical Interpretations and the History of Receptions* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018).

³ New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁴ See *Equiano's travels; the interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vassa, the African*. New York: Praeger, 1967.

way elucidating the “meaning of this text.” After all semiotics and linguistics have long shown that a text never had a meaning—readers are always and necessarily making sense of the characters on the page. And in the case of any given text that is viewed as scripture this is even more true. Reading a scriptural text for its meaning is always and necessarily misreading it. This is what biblical scholars of any kind need to accept, so as to acknowledge that a proper study of a scriptural text must necessarily involve analyzing and accounting for its always surprising but appropriate scripturalizations in a diversity of contexts. Such is the contribution that I hope to make to our collective project of scripturalization.

I.5: “Stones in the shape of letters, form[ing] a book’: *Zolai* and the Inscription of Laipian Identity”

By: Lalruatkima

General description of scripturalizing dynamic(s)/practice(s)/event(s) (who, what, when, where?)

Khup Go¹ lives in Tuizang, a remote village located along the foothills of Kalay city in northwest Burma. Interacting with Khup in the summer of 2018, I learned that he had discontinued formal education since leaving school in class 8. Khup is a subsistence farmer and spends most of his time between his house and the small plot of land where he grows vegetables for consumption and for trade with other grocery items. His wife passed away during labor two years ago. He now lives with his three daughters, the oldest of them being 6 years old.

When we approached his house, I was curious about the framed image that he had mounted to the side of the entrance to his house. The frame (Fig.1) had an image of a spear, a portrait of a man, and a table of logographs. For someone who did not keep any other literary material in his house—a one room thatched structure that doubled as kitchen, sleeping area, and living area, depending on the time of the day—the frame hanging outside was a curiosity.

¹ All starred (*) names are anonymous