

## “The Brueggemann Exercise”: What do I bring to the task of reading the Bible?



### Reviewing my own personal history

In 2008 a book by Professor Walter Brueggemann (an Old Testament scholar based in the USA) was published entitled *A Pathway to Interpretation*. This was republished in 2009 under the revised title *Redescribing Reality – What we do when we read the Bible*. [SCM Press]. It is a book about hermeneutical methodology. Professor Brueggemann writes,

*“I have wanted to explore with some care a responsible way of textual interpretation that takes seriously both critical learning and confessional passion but that is not too preoccupied as to be drawn away from the text itself by methodological issues” He goes on to say that reflecting on method “has permitted me to review my own personal history and the ways in which I have been nurtured in a particular style of interpretation”. He outlines what he has been learning “about (his) own personal history with reference to the text and its interpretation” and encourages his readers to “reflect on how (their) own heritage, upbringing, religious and academic training, and mentors have influenced (their) reading of Scripture”.*

What follows is an exercise, based on Professor Brueggemann’s review asking the kind of questions he asked of himself so that we might identify these influences for ourselves.

The purpose of the exercise is to help you identify the influences on you in relation to the way you read the Bible. You will only be asked to share what you are comfortable to share.

Each section seeks to examine a particular phase in your life by posing questions that might help you to look back and review it. There is then a more general over-arching question that attempts to focus what might have been happening for you during this phase of your life.

You may find the questions are not necessarily the most helpful way to review your personal history in which case simply use the headings and reflect on them in a way you find more helpful. You may find that pictures or symbols are better ways of reviewing your history – if so use them instead of words.

## **1 – my formative years up to leaving school**

Where I grew up – what were the cultural influences in relation to the Bible? Was there family influence that nurtured me in the Bible? Were there any battles being waged in terms of the Bible?

***How would you describe the central message of this period? Were there issues that dominated?***

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## **2 – the Church or Christian tradition in which I was brought up or into which I entered**

What was the origin of that tradition? Who were the formative personalities involved? Was the tradition 'over against' another expression? Did it resist or become defensive about any other expression of Christianity?

***How would you describe the vision of what the Church was?***

### **3 – my formal university, seminary, theological college education**

Was there a recognisable tradition that influenced any of these institutions? Who were the people that had a major influence on you during these years? Who or what had influenced them? How would you describe the approaches to Biblical scholarship? What other influences were there during this period – books, conferences, people, movements etc?

***How would you describe the tradition of this period that you inherited?***

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### **4 – applying this learning in ministry**

What have been the different contexts of your ministry – place, tasks etc? What significant events, nationally and internationally, have occurred as your ministry has developed? E.g. political upheavals, disasters, national or international movements. If you preach regularly – how would you describe your style? Who and what have been the major influences on you in ministry? What have been the major hermeneutical challenges you have encountered?

***How would you describe your journey in ministry especially in relation to the way you interpret the Bible?***

## 5 – looking back from now

Can you identify lasting strands in your history, where the continuity is?

Can you identify major changes and developments in your history, where 'taken-for-granted' paradigms had to be examined?

Can you identify what others might see as major gaps in your journey?

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## 6 – reviewing the exercise

After using the exercise can you make any comments on the following questions:

- What effect has this had on me?
- What have I realised about myself?
- What have I realised about others?