

Luisa Simonutti (ed.), *Locke and Biblical Hermeneutics: Conscience and Scripture*, Springer, Cham 2019, 266 pp.

Locke's religious concerns and interests pervade virtually all areas of his production. Not only his public as well as private writings on religion, but also his major works on philosophy and politics, including *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government*, denote his preoccupation with theological and soteriological matters, which conditioned his philosophical, moral, and political inquiries. In these and other books, Locke frequently referred to Scripture in order to strengthen or even ground his arguments concerning several issues, such as the necessity to have recourse to divine revelation where unassisted reason does not reach, the existence of angels and other spiritual beings, and the theological foundation of natural law. Locke's reading of the Christian Scriptures actually played a central role in shaping his mentality and ideas. Therefore, Locke's Scripture-based religious views are attracting the attention of a growing number of scholars, including, among others, the contributors to this new collection of essays.

Locke's biblical interpretation is the topic of this volume, edited by Luisa Simonutti and presenting twelve essays by as many specialists in Locke's religious thought, besides an introduction by Simonutti. The volume is divided into three parts of different length. Part 1, "Comparison of the Hermeneutics", consists of three chapters. The first chapter, authored by the late Henning Graf Reventlow, examines the development of Locke's hermeneutics from the *Essay* of 1690 to *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and the unfinished *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*. Then, Agostino Lupoli's essay reassesses the impact of Boyle's religious thought on Locke's soteriology. Finally, Luisa Simonutti's chapter offers a detailed analysis of Locke's views on

bodily resurrection, thus reconsidering an important aspect of his mortalism. Part 2 concentrates on hermeneutics as “a method for belief”. In this section of the book, Victor Nuovo, Jean-Michel Vienne, Raffaele Russo, and the late Justin Champion focus on the role that Locke’s biblical exegesis had, respectively, in the making of his original version of Protestant Christianity, in the formulation of his notion of religious belief as “reasonable”, in the elaboration of his method of paraphrase, and in his consideration of Scripture and its divine authority. Finally, Part 3, “Interpretations of Locke’s Biblical Hermeneutics”, presents five essays that analyze the historical significance of Locke’s scriptural exegesis. In this section, Kim Ian Parker draws several parallels between Spinoza’s and Locke’s hermeneutical methods while calling attention to their different backgrounds and aims. Concerning later religious writers’ consideration of Locke’s hermeneutics, the late Arthur Wainwright’s essay sheds new light on Locke’s influence on eighteenth-century Dissenting ministers such as James Peirce, Joseph Hallett, and George Benson, while Gian Mario Cazzaniga’s chapter offers a fresh reassessment of the impact of Locke’s Christology on Enlightenment views of Jesus. Finally, Giambattista Gori’s and Maria-Cristina Pitassi’s essays critically analyze Locke’s scrutiny of the Pauline epistles in the *Paraphrase* and other texts.

Instead of giving a detailed evaluation of each of the twelve essays in this collection, I prefer to highlight the main merits of this much-needed volume. This is indeed an admirable book in that its chapters, when taken all together, provide a thorough explanation and a convincing reconsideration of Locke’s interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. One of the key benefits of this volume is in its detailed and accurate investigation of the major aspects and implications of Locke’s hermeneutics, which I have briefly mentioned above in this review. As a result, upon reading the whole volume, the reader will have a clear understanding of the crucial elements of Locke’s hermeneutical method and ideas. Moreover, this volume enables the reader to properly comprehend Locke’s relation to some contemporary biblical exegetes (*e.g.*, Spinoza, Boyle, and various “religious supernaturalists” of the seventeenth century), as well as the impact of his theological views on eighteenth-century intellectuals of different stripes – from Nonconformist divines to Enlightenment *philosophes*.

The contextualist approach adopted by the contributors to this volume facilitates a reappraisal of the intellectual context in which Locke composed his religious writings. The essays in this collection indeed take into account not only Locke’s texts, but also the philosophical and theological disputes and the writers, books, and currents that most influenced his religious views. Thus,

another merit of this volume is in the fact that it relocates Locke's thought in the context of the seventeenth-century debates on subjects such as the divine inspiration of Scripture, the different levels of authority of various biblical texts, the relationship between morality and religious belief, the pursuit of salvation, the resurrection of the dead, and the Last Judgment. Accordingly, the reassessment of Locke's biblical hermeneutics in all the essays comprising this collection contributes to the rethinking of this philosopher as a markedly *Christian* thinker. In fact, Locke's religious concerns and interests played a primary role in shaping his mindset and, hence, his philosophical ideas and methods, too. This is the case, for instance, with the notions of "belief" and "faith", which Locke explained in the *Essay*, but which cannot be appreciated adequately without a proper understanding of his scriptural exegesis. Briefly, this volume accurately portrays Locke as a thinker belonging to both the late Reformation and the early Enlightenment (to use common historiographical categories).

Finally yet importantly, all the essays in this volume are written in a clear and simple style and are hence accessible not only to Locke specialists, but also to an educated lay audience. This is definitely a significant advantage, because both Locke experts and those willing to know more about this important philosopher will benefit from this book. For all the above reasons, this collection of essays edited by Luisa Simonutti is an indispensable tool for the study of Locke's biblical hermeneutics. This volume is likely to become a standard book in the field of Locke studies, since it enables a better understanding not only of Locke's religious ideas, but also of his mind, objectives, and oeuvre as a whole.

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