

Peter A. Sutcliffe, *Is There an Author in This Text?: Discovering the Otherness of the Text* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), paperback, x + 430 pp., ISBN: 978-1-62032-823-1, US\$ 48.00.

Originally completed and passed as a Ph.D. thesis for the University of Wales, Bangor (now University of Bangor) in the United Kingdom in 2012 with the title “Is There An Author In This Text?: A Re-evaluation of Authorial Intent Pursued as Ontological Disclosing the Being of the Entity of the Composition in Understanding an Author’s Communication,” Peter A. Sutcliffe sought to provide an alternative route of viewing the scriptural text, deviating from the postmodern approaches. This is a courageous work. An innovation which shows clarity in evaluating the current debates on interpreting the biblical text. He gives thoughtful attention to the “ontological route” in dealing with texts and not merely on the language which they employ. (See especially 244-264 and 265-300.) He also cuts through the philosophical approaches to hermeneutics. Sutcliffe brings into this research his Pentecostal background without embarrassment. He is coming from the perspective “that God continues to speak to any present reader by means of the [scriptural] text those [biblical] authors had written.” (vii) He is concerned to clarify the nature of authorial “intentionality,” to categorize the “being” of personal composition and to consider the process of interpretive “task.” (vii-viii) For Sutcliffe, “the aim must be disclosure of the hermeneutical task, not the justification of a point of view.” (ix) The preceding concern is clearly expressed in the original subtitle of the thesis. The nature of text as composition cannot be separated from the author of composition as purposely intentional. (13-14)

In his revised and expanded doctoral work that is now published with the same title *Is There an Author in This Text?* Sutcliffe has put an emphasis on *Discovering the Otherness of the Text* by using it as a subtitle. (cf. chapters 12-13) The contemporary trend in viewing texts has inclination to follow the postmodern ideas, and especially on the question of textual meaning. A willingness of a reader to examine his argument on its merits would not just challenge the postmodern assertions but all in all the issue of ontological argument that he raises for the justification of authorial intent should convince a reader that Sutcliffe’s case is worthy of serious consideration. He presents a logically valid rationale for re-establishing a valid presupposition and an unambiguous understanding of authorial intent. (140-157 and 186-207) Moreover, an ontological approach could move things in a

different direction, which for the reviewer is critical in addressing the legitimate understanding of the scriptural text for the future of biblical hermeneutics. Sutcliffe has rigorously developed this significant concept of the 'ontological being' of the composition of the text. Hence, he rightfully takes the ontological argument in dealing with the authorial intent. Sutcliffe's work could lead to a new direction that would have a positive effect on hermeneutics. Therefore, *Is There an Author in This Text?*, which upholds the view of authorial intentionality in reading the composition written into text, is worth analyzing carefully. (cf. 236-264)

Using thirteen chapters, Sutcliffe deals with the issues of authorial centered hermeneutics, the arguments of author's demise perspective, the existence of the being of the text and the necessary otherness of the text. Accordingly, he places the interpreter in the model of "the task unfolds as a task" as a facilitator of understanding and not the determiner of understanding. (416) What Sutcliffe emphasizes then is "that understanding occurs at the level of existence." (416) He astutely reasons out that:

The issue of hermeneutics is a consideration of *intentioned-being*, which itself is given being by authorial intent, in order that the interpreter can understand, or see, what the author understood, or saw. What is understood can be assimilated inwardly deriving meaning, which determines selfhood as expressed in life. Meaning is therefore the impact of what is understood, and understanding is the encounter of *otherness*. Meaning should not begin with self, but with understanding in the encounter of *otherness*. The view of interpretation as sameness of meaning is incredible. True interpretation as equivalence of understanding is credible. (418)

In his first chapter Sutcliffe places the context of his research in the postmodern setting of interpreting written texts. Then, in the next three chapters, he deals with the "conundrum" and "paradox" of the authorial intention of the author in his composition, which is presented into a text. Citing the view of N. T. Wright, he sees the important acknowledgment that "aesthetics and belief, though subjective, are part of knowing, then an author and interpreter must connect with this knowledge." (26) Sutcliffe even coined the word "pistology" (from *pistis* – "faith" and *logos* – "word") in "dealing with belief knowledge" rather than using the common word theology so that he can stress in

“pistology” the idea of belief as something general to all people. (27) He also argues that “the nature of the authorial intent” is that of “an antecedent and precursor of the written text.” (47) Thus, in chapter 5 he describes how “The Reports of the Author’s Death Have Been Greatly Exaggerated.” Afterwards in the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th chapters, Sutcliffe defined, explored and upheld the notion of the authorial intention in connection to an existing text. And in the last three chapters, he further presents the concepts of the “being of the text” and the “otherness of the text,” as well as a reevaluation of the perception of “meaning” and “understanding.”

What Sutcliffe makes unmistakable about his argument for the necessity of the authorial intent in understanding a written text is the idea that what the author “saw” is that which what the author wants the reader to see. (70) He is avoiding the appeal of linguistics for an answer to the conundrum of the meaning of the text. “The authorial intent, in acting as the antecedent of the text (i.e., it is what the text refers back to), is what preceded the text and acted as the cause of its being as text.” (70) It is a good decision for Sutcliffe and a major strength of the book that he employs many of his illustrations to argue a point using biblical references and examples. His Pentecostal background reflects well in his illustrations. It is also helpful for him to summarize and engage with the most influential philosophers of hermeneutics. His interest in the British academic Anthony Thiselton, the American scholar Kevin Vanhoozer, and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur are immediately notable in his work. He cites and engages mainly with these three and other prominent thinkers such as Gadamer, Derrida, Heidegger, Barthes, Schleiermacher, Wittgenstein, Hegel, Stendhal, Wolterstorff with biblical exegetes like Fee and Marshall, theologians such as Pannenberg and Erickson, Pentecostal scholars like Tate and Dempster, and many others like Fish, Hirsch, Bultmann, Beardsley and Wimsatt, *etcetera*, that are involved in these complex and intricate debates in interpreting texts. Sutcliffe’s research scope has a clear focus. Commitment to authorial intent in interpreting the text is second to nothing. It is a *sine qua non*. The author is the antecedent of the text. It is worth quoting Sutcliffe in full when he concludes that:

The concept of an autonomous text has failed to take account of the retention of the authorial intent in the act of *parole*. The argument that detachment results in autonomy is not compelling. The recognition of the transformation of authorial

intent in the act of *parole* was not recognized, and sight of the author was lost. The primary reason for this is the failure to recognize the entity of the composition in its relationship to the entity of the text. The current theory on the entity of the text has resulted in the compositions concealment and therefore also the concealment of authorial intent; but despite this concealment the current theory has no way in which to contend and deal with the logic of its existence. (139)

His discussion on *parole* or the actual words expressed by people (contrasted to *langue*) is helpful. He correctly argues that with every postmodern theory currently existing, making the text autonomous and emphasizing the notion of reader's response in the hermeneutical process, the sensibleness of the presence of the authorial intent in the being of the composition that is written in the text fails to address the ontological relationship of the composition and the text. Postmodern theories killed the text. Sutcliffe revives the text. The being of the composition brings life to the text. Thus, the author of the text is made alive. *Is There an Author in This Text?* is not only providing an alternative hermeneutical perspective to the contemporary postmodern views, but it also gives a penetrating argument for the case of authorial intention in dealing with the text. Sutcliffe rightly argues from the angle of the being of the composition with the antecedent of the necessary intent of the author placing the reader in a place to see what the author saw.

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