Schreiner, Patrick. *The Four Senses of Scripture: Learning from Ancient Ways of Reading the Bible.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2026. 234pp. + 31pp. (front matter) + 24pp. (back matter).

Patrick Schreiner is son of famed NT scholar and professor Thomas R. Schreiner. Patrick presently serves as professor of NT and biblical theology and is the director of the residency PhD program at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), which has one of the largest PhD in theology enrollments in the world.

The Four Senses of Scripture is a volume dedicated to the "retrieval" of the *quadriga* (14–15). The *quadriga* is a hermeneutic that employs four elements: the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. The thesis is explicitly stated: "The fourfold approach to interpretation offers a more comprehensive way of reading Scripture than the dominant modern academic approaches do" (7; cf. 229). As a "retrieval" work, the aim is that readers would engage with and follow the hermeneutical model exemplified by Christian medieval interpretation.

Schreiner unpacks his volume in three parts. Part 1 assimilates readers to the need, content, and central hermeneutical influence on the structure of the *quadriga*. Part 2 defines each element of the *quadriga*, shows how it is interconnected with the other elements, and describes its import for biblical study. Part 3 defends the approach in response to objections. Two appendices follow.

Schreiner demonstrates an excellent familiarity with ancient and current literature on the topic. It is especially apparent in the section that briefly traces the history of typology (208). The book is in many ways a reflection of the boom in evangelical academics to push the utilization of so-called ancient hermeneutical methods of interpretation. Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) has come to be the most popular attempt. The *quadriga* (fourfold sense) is a subgenre of TIS. In 2010 Schreiner's alma mater made TIS the focus of its summer edition in volume 14 of *The Southern Baptist Theological Journal* (*SBJT*). Schreiner's work may be viewed as an extension of that stream of thought.

Several inconsistencies are apparent throughout the volume, leading to the conclusion that Schreiner does not prove his thesis. Through a few questionable uses of early church history in chapter 2, Schreiner assumes the antiquity of the *quadriga* and uses it as support for his criticism of an exclusive "grammatical-historical" method. He implies that the "singular" grammatical-historical method is not ancient but the evangelical child of "the historical-critical school" (12). Thus, it is a method that is not truly Christian. He identifies it as lacking "a historical pedigree that goes beyond the last 150 years" (12). He again does not attempt to prove his assertion. The recent scholarship of Paul Hartog in *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio (El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023) provides evidence contrary to Schreiner's claim. It was published the same year he began writing his book.

A third critique is Schreiner's consistent undermining of (or at least double-talk around) the centrality and necessity of the grammatical-historical hermeneutic: "To reject allegory wholesale is to reject Paul's labeling of his own interpretive practices" (17). He later writes, "The literal sense can stand on its own" (33). Yet his overarching conclusion throughout the volume is that the literal sense cannot stand on its own.

Space prohibits discussion of semiotics in chapter 3. Its purpose is to furnish the reader with the worldview of the medieval mind. In this chapter Schreiner intends to enable readers to make more of biblical metaphors and correlations than are present in the biblical text. Thus, he defends the Platonic character of medieval thinking and argues for what he calls a "participatory" reading of Scripture (199–200).

Chapter 4 is devoted to defining "the literal sense" from a *quadriga*-driven hermeneutic. The central thrust is to view Scripture as a bifurcation between human and divine authorship. The result is that the human author may have intended one meaning when writing a passage, but God ultimately had multiple. Schreiner's view of divine and human authorship is a rejection of the received laws of language and the univocal nature of Scripture. Scripture speaks from a unitary voice because all the words of Scripture are God's words, providing the locus of meaning from within individual passages.

The most serious critique of this volume is its support for "the allegorical sense" (91). Allegorism permeates most of the book. Chapter 5 is devoted to it. Schreiner defines *allegory* as "the Christological sense of Scripture, where we perceive the deeper meaning of the words in conjunction with authorial intent" (92). Schreiner engages in a conflation of terms to an alarming degree in this chapter and throughout the volume in support of the use of the allegorical sense. The terms *typological, allegorical, spiritual, figural,* and *symbolic* are transmuted to mean the same thing (see 31, 92, 96, 97, 117, 118). Schreiner empathizes with identifying allegory as a "Christianized-Platonic sense" and "biblical alchemy" (92).

Schreiner is convinced that the allegorical sense is essential for a faithful hermeneutic: "If any of the four senses is divorced from the others, we starve, pervert, and corrupt meaning" (12). In other words, he essentially asserts that those who do *not* include the allegorical sense in their hermeneutic are irresponsible with Scripture.

All of his demands for the inclusion of an allegorical approach to Scripture come to bear in the exegetical discussions within both chapter 5 and the remaining chapters in part 2. Christ is identified as "the key to the Scriptures" (108). This assertion is made, not as a theological reality that shapes every facet of the canon, but as a reality that supposedly transforms linguistics and grammar from more of a science to more of an art (104).

By identifying Christ in this way Schreiner argues that "Joshua's conquest" is "the victory of Christ" (108). Does this mean that Christ's victory is incomplete as Joshua's was? The queen of Sheba's visit means the same thing as Ephesians 3:6. David and Goliath is not about God's sovereignty (1 Sam 17:47), but about "spiritual combat" (144).

Schreiner's major exegetical failure is his claim that Paul understands the two women of Galatians 4:24 "allegorically" (114): "Paul says these things are to be taken allegorically" (142). Scripture offers no evidence that Paul interpreted allegorically. Schreiner escapes dealing with the lexical issue by opening the preceding paragraph with the assertion, "Semantics aside" (114). He ignores the fact that the active form of the verb can mean "to interpret allegorically," but the passive form means "to be expressed by way of allegory" (MGS, s.v. "ἀλληγορέω"). Paul uses the passive form and thus conveys that he was not interpreting the Genesis account in an allegorical manner but spoke illustratively.

Schreiner then stresses his point: "Paul explicitly names this reading allegory, revealing that our modern definition of typology falls short of capturing what he actually does" (116).

While there is much to commend this volume's explanation of the other three so-called senses, which amount to interpretation and application, one could rightly contend that it is essentially a manual on "how to allegorize Scripture." Schreiner's allegorical approach intentionally permeates the entire volume. Its final chapter is a response to those who oppose allegorizing Scripture. He ultimately concludes that to allegorize Scripture accurately one must learn "to distinguish 'biblical' allegory from 'unbiblical' allegory" (206), since it becomes apparent that the approach is not related to the received laws of language.

Scholars will likely ask the question about guardrails for employing an allegorical reading that prevent an interpreter from venturing into meanings opposite the text. Schreiner's initial answer is: "It is hard to quantify how far is too far" (217). He is convinced that it is unwise "to define allegory on lexicography alone" (213). He even argues that "one ought to be wary of too quickly running to Christological readings" (217). Ultimately, he concludes that "allegory is . . noticing how everything is connected in some way to the Son" (221). Thus, for Schreiner, it seems that all interpretations are right interpretations as long as they find their way to Christ.

Schreiner contends that he is doing something genuinely different, though his reading of Scripture is genetically related to common typological approaches. In this, he is partially correct. He is advocating for something different. His reintroduction of the *quadriga* aims to make something out of the text of Scripture that it does not mean. Such is the most common definition of allegorical interpretation.

This volume is a mid-level academic work. It is probably most useful for a class covering current trends in biblical interpretation. It is not a book that will be useful for modeling a consistent or reliable hermeneutical method. As interesting and novel as the *quadriga* might seem to many Bible readers, the system is loaded with so many qualifications (e.g., its inherent subjectivity) that users of this method will most likely experience a paralysis by analysis when seeking the central meaning of a passage.

Andres Reyes
PhD Student | BJU Seminary