

# Book Reviews

## Review Article

### **The Use of the Old Testament in Hebrews: A Case Study in Early Jewish Bible Interpretation.**

Susan E. Docherty. (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2/260) Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2009. Hbk. Pp.233. €59.

Hebrews' use of the Jewish scriptures may appear to be biblical terrain already well furrowed, but Susan E. Docherty's recent monograph helpfully opens up new, untilled fields of scholarly inquiry. A revision of her doctoral thesis, written under the supervision of Philip Alexander (whose own interest and work permeates the book in various places), Docherty proposes that Hebrews be understood as an exemplar of post-biblical Jewish exegesis, one that exhibits the characteristic interpretative techniques of the Jewish tradition. Beginning with the question of the so-called "Parting of the Ways" between Judaism and Christianity, she advocates that the parting may be somewhat later than many scholars have suggested, and Hebrews therefore remains fundamentally a Jewish text, presenting characteristically Jewish interpretative strategies.

As such, Docherty takes issue with much recent work on Hebrews' use of the Old Testament, the scope of her criticism essentially two fold. First, she argues that New Testament scholars have failed to appropriate new developments in Jewish studies, specifically the recent discourse on ancient Jewish exegetical method. Although the last three or four decades have witnessed a renewed recognition of the Jewishness of the New Testament, the implications of this for Hebrews' use of the Old Testament, she ventures, have not yet been fully embraced. There is consequently frequent scholarly imprecision *viz-à-viz* Hebrews' exegetical technique, and she is critical of the vague labels that have been naively applied to it. There is little attempt, she argues, to explain or understand *how* Hebrews goes about interpreting the Old Testament, or to articulate what the writer actually understood by the notion of scripture. Thus where many have ascribed some sort of christological lens to Hebrews' appropriation of the Old Testament, Docherty finds such a view overly reductive, and an insufficient category by which to describe Hebrews' exegetical method. Instead, she proposes treating Hebrews as a genuine post-biblical interpreter, one working within accepted techniques of Jewish exegesis, rather than someone restricted to vague or ill-defined categories such as "typology", "midrash" or "re-contextualisation."

It may well be possible to reach a deeper and more precise understanding of how the New Testament writers were using their scriptural sources if commentators were to follow Samely and Boyarin in asking whether their interpretations resulted in something in the original text, rather than simply assuming they must have been reading the Old Testament christologically or with the intention of finding in it some sort of ‘proof’ for their beliefs about Jesus (117).

Docherty does not want to disavow midrash as a category, quite the reverse, but argues that New Testament scholars are generally unaware of what they mean by the phrase and the term therefore needs to be properly defined. Embracing recent advances in Jewish studies, she ventures, will give commentators a “new vocabulary” (7) by which to articulate Hebrews’ interpretive strategy.

Docherty’s other major concern is the imprecision with which commentators have treated the Septuagint *Vorlage* of Hebrews’ author. Whilst LXX studies have moved well beyond the traditional appeal to Alexandrinus or Vaticanus as evidence of the “Septuagint reading”, and whilst there is now the realization of a variety of Greek textual forms, she argues that Hebrews’ commentators have been generally lax in dealing with this LXX textual diversity. They have tended to conceive of Hebrews’ author changing his *Vorlage* to suit theological whim. Docherty instead proposes that contemporary textual fluidity renders such assumptions less likely, and that the burden of proof is rather on those who suggest that the text has been varied for theological or authorial gain. The overall character/habits of an author need to be taken into account, and if (s)he is regularly faithful to a received text, then such consistency needs to be taken into account when apparently variant forms are found.

The main core of the book, then, teases out these two concerns in more detail, with chapters 2-4 taking up the mantle. Much of chapter 2 is devoted to a literature review of major works on Hebrews (commentaries, monographs and articles – a veritable *Beispielreihen* to rival that of Heb. 11!), seeking to demonstrate the limitations of such works in relation to Hebrews’ use of the Old Testament. Docherty’s analysis is very detailed and comprehensive; indeed, whilst having to be necessarily selective because of space limitations, the review is very useful in and of itself, for it provides an overview of the commentaries well beyond their discussion of Old Testament matters. Its tone is, at times, somewhat bullish, as Docherty seeks to underscore the vacuum of attention to Jewish interpretative technique, and it is fair to say that she takes some significant scalps along the way: Vanhoye’s treatment of Hebrews’ use of

the Old Testament is “rather naïve” (58), and Attridge’s discussion of Septuagint texts “rather shallow” (36). The list is clearly selective, and the work, for example, of Pamela Eisenbaum on Hebrews’ Jewish-Christian hermeneutics seems a notable omission, but such criticism is somewhat churlish, as Docherty frequently acknowledges that her discussion is not exhaustive.

Having argued for Hebrews scholarship’s indifference to, and perhaps even ignorance of, recent developments in Jewish studies, Docherty turns next to such developments herself, taking the reader on a similar literary review of work on Jewish interpretative tradition, and particularly that of midrash. She pays due attention to the work of Bloch, Vermes and Neusner, as well as the contributions of Boyarin and Fishbane, but the focus of her analysis is the pioneering work of Arnold Goldberg and his pupils, most notably Alexander Samely, noting how their work remains relatively foreign to most New Testament scholars. Goldberg’s form-analysis strategy, and its close attention to the individual constituent portions of the midrash, is of particular interest; its “bottom up”, piece-by-piece approach, she suggests, potentially befits Hebrews better than the macro/whole document interpretative approach taken by Jacob Neusner. The latter methodology, one senses, effectively amounts to the christological hermeneutic of which Docherty is so critical.

The fourth chapter takes up Docherty’s other criticism of Hebrews’ status quo, namely the general ignorance regarding the textual diversity of the Septuagint. As with previous ones, the chapter is a useful introduction to the whole topic of the Greek OT tradition, and, for this reason, valuable in and of itself. She advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the LXX textual tradition(s), one that recognizes the diversity and variety of textual variants now available. To demonstrate this, she steps through the quotations of Heb 1 and 3-4, attempting to ascertain where the author has changed his *Vorlage*, or where his reading merely reflects a variant textual form.

Chapter 5, however, is ultimately where Docherty’s project is going, as she applies to Hebrews a “precise descriptive-analysis inspired by the work of the Goldbergian School” (143). The exercise proves to be highly fruitful and illuminating. Applying the methodology to Heb 1 and 3-4 (two differing sections – one a catena, the other a more extended exegetical discourse), a number of salient points emerge. She suggests that, as with midrashic practice, Hebrews takes a text – often first person speech, often of a solemn nature, but one customarily ambiguous or ill-defined in nature – and recasts it in a fresh context that specifies its

meaning (and the identity of the speaker – cf. 1:7). This new context – or “co-text” – is normally those verses that precede the quotation (namely 1:1-4 or 3:1-6) such that the quotations are understood in the light of that new co-text. Words such as “son”, “angel” or “rest” become clarified through this “re-framing” process, with the co-text providing the frame. Ambiguous words or concepts thus have their meaning fixed for the letter; to sit at the right hand (1:13), for example, becomes not merely any old self-positioning, but rather a loaded term, the assumption of a very particular position by a very particular figure.

Therefore, for Docherty, “(t)he importance of the introduction to the catena cannot be overstated” (177), because of the functional framing role it fulfils. Consequently, one wonders whether such importance actually invokes the christological lens that she disavows, even if indirectly or secondarily so. The *technique* is to re-frame the lemma in its new source, in appropriately Jewish fashion (this is Docherty’s key, helpful insight); it just so happens – and Docherty might have been more transparent here – that the new framework relates to the impact of the Christ event (if that is indeed what Hebrews’ prologue may be said to announce). One might say therefore that Docherty’s assessment is certainly *far more* than christological, though remains not “*un-christological*.”

Other important Jewish techniques also emerge from Docherty’s analysis. Hebrews’ attention to specific words (son, servant, rest, today) is characteristic of Samely’s understanding of midrashic practice, as is the technique of dividing up a quotation into parts to exegete it in detail. Docherty draws out Hebrews’ use of the technique of “Opposition” (a term is defined by being in opposition to another – a “servant” is a direct contrast to a “son”), and this yields particular insight in Heb 4:6. Because some didn’t enter the rest because of disobedience, “opposition” interpretative strategy implies that others *will* do so – the verse therefore becomes one of hopeful promise. This is a significant addition to our understanding of the whole pericope.

Overall, I find myself very much in agreement with Docherty’s general thesis and welcome the conclusions she draws. It offers bridges between New Testament and Jewish studies by seeking to understand, and interpret, Hebrews as a fundamentally Jewish text. The notion of Hebrews carrying forward the context of its quotations is something I myself have sought to demonstrate (we are on particularly common ground here in respect of Deut 32), as is the way in which Hebrews stands very much within Jewish traditions of working/re-working scriptural material. The book can hardly be said to be the last word on

Hebrews' use of the OT, and, one suspects, it would never claim to be so. Docherty attends, for example, essentially to quotations – that is the focus of her enquiry – but they are not the full gamut of Hebrews' appropriation of the OT. It would be interesting, therefore, to see if her proposals extend to Hebrews' use of allusions or echoes (and indeed to the other quotations in the letter, beyond chapters 1 and 3-4). One suspects that such analysis would yield further rich soil to plough.

*David Allen*

*Queen's Foundation, Birmingham*

## **General**

### **Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries.**

Everett Ferguson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. Hbk. Pp. xxii+953. \$60.

There has been a tendency, going back over several centuries, to imagine that baptism is the simple sacrament: its sacramental status was not challenged at the time of the Reformation and, by comparison with the Eucharist, it was not the focus of bitter fighting. What disputes did take place were about its 'meaning' – a questioning usually framed within the parameters of arguments about grace – or on details such as infant versus believer baptism. The result was that the study of the history of baptism as a practice in the churches of the first centuries became, to a great extent, either a pursuit of evidence for or against particular controversial practices (infants/adults or immersion/aspersion) or a matter of scriptural exegesis whereby 'baptism,' seen as a theological object, was located within a particular writer's thought and its significance for that author became the content of the investigation. Lurking within these studies were three assumptions which tended to dull enquiry. First, that there was a great deal that could be taken for granted about baptism and its significance (a position that was usually seen to be supported by copious references to Paul's writings). Second, that there was a difference in the quality and status of evidence between what was found in the canonical collection, 'scripture,' and other, implicitly considered as later, writings, 'tradition,' such that while the relationship between the two might be disputed, that there was a unique status to be accorded to the canonical collection was taken for granted. And third, that in order to understand baptism preference should be given to examining theological texts over the study of the practices: in effect, the former were studied by scholars of the first division whether they were biblical exegetes or historians of

doctrine, while the latter fell among the concerns of second-division scholars such as church historians or, worse, historians of liturgy.

As these assumptions gradually began to crumble during the twentieth century – though they have by no means vanished completely – it became clear that baptism, no more than any other practice found among the churches, was not nearly so clear-cut as had hitherto been imagined; and studies from a wide range of specialists showed up the variety of practices and explanations that could be found in the churches, in early preaching, and in underlying theology. Confronted with this ever-growing mass of material many scholars sought convenient ways to reduce the complexity of the evidence in order to produce partial, if well-evidenced, pictures of the situation in the first centuries; the alternative, a comprehensive and encyclopedic overview, seemed to be a work beyond the energies of any one person.

However, it is with pleasure that I can now report that that much-wanted encyclopedic work – and I use the word ‘encyclopedic’ in its technical sense and as a term of praise – is now here. Ferguson’s mammoth work summarises all the scholarship (whether on ancient literary texts, evidence for liturgical forms, or on archaeology), presents it fairly and accessibly, while providing a succinct overview. The book begins with the ritual baths of late Second Temple Judaism and ends with the great patristic writers (Greek, Latin, and Syriac) of the age of Augustine (354-430). Quite apart from its amply fulfilling a need, this reviewer was struck by how comprehensive and up-to-date are its references to the work of other scholars. Moreover, given the encyclopedic nature of the work, it does not assume that its readers will be equally at ease with all the areas that it addresses, which means that any one specialist, or student, is guided in areas with which they may not be familiar.

This praise does not mean that it is without faults – or, at least, that a few remarks on its approach may be in order. The work is slanted towards those questions (for example its frequent discussions of the sizes of fonts where one suspects the lurking concern of those who ‘turn to history’ for their disputes over ‘dunking’ versus ‘sprinkling’ and the like) which attract many to the study of ‘the primitive church’ as a period that is perceived as somehow ‘normative’ for Christian practice. This is also seen in the distinction invoked between evidence from within the canonical collection (chs 6-11) and from writers who are presented as belonging within the old, and seriously confused, category of ‘the apostolic fathers’ (ch. 12) - who are assumed to belong in ‘Part Three [of the book]: The Second Century.’ One has to follow the footnotes

carefully to notice that Ferguson, following sound scholarly judgement, places parts of the canonical collection in the second century, while also recognizing that elements from the chapter labelled ‘the apostolic fathers,’ such as the *Didache*, belong to the first century. Given that this is an encyclopedia, arranged historically, it would have been better to locate the evidence in a strictly chronological sequence and abandon the notion of ‘scripture’ entirely (except to the extent that it became a causal factor in the thinking of some writers on baptism in the later third century). By retaining the category of ‘scripture’ Ferguson has unwittingly perpetuated the confusion of a later theological distinction of ‘scripture / tradition’ (whatever its inherent validity within systematic theology) with historical sequence.

While this book is probably too big to be a textbook for students, it will establish itself as a standard point of departure for any scholar looking at baptism – under any heading – and its individual chapters will be cited on many and various bibliographies. This is a *tour de force* and we are all in Ferguson’s debt.

*Thomas O’Loughlin*

*University of Nottingham*

### **How Contemporary Novelists Rewrite Stories From the Bible.**

Anthony C. Swindell. Lewiston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2009. Hbk. Pp.356.

This very substantial book - which originated as a PhD thesis at the University of Leeds - seeks to examine fourteen monographs written by different authors over a period of thirty years (1972-2002) on the subject of the treatment of specific biblical stories in literature, art and theology, mainly in that order of priority. Several of the monographs selected are by authors probably reasonably well-known to those with an interest in biblical reception history and include Richard Trexler (on the subject of the Magi), Margarita Stocker (on Judith), Pamela Norris (Eve) and Yvonne Sherwood (on Jonah). The study surveys the fourteen reception-histories as ‘a phenomenon’ and looks at the way the authors select their material and the use they make of that material which can lead to a multiplicity of interpretations. Swindell uses these fourteen works for a variety of purposes: for example, for the ‘finding of theology’ in reception history studies and applies a wide number of literary theories in order to bring out the significance of the authors’ contribution to our reading and understanding the wider ramifications of the biblical stories. There is an extensive table of contents, copious footnotes and a

comprehensive bibliography indicating that the entire book has been presented in more or less the same shape as the original thesis.

As Terence Wright notes in the foreword, readers of this book will discover that the literary rewritings of the Bible present a powerful challenge to the past (and present) dominance of ‘mainstream’ authoritarian or fundamentalist attempts to close its interpretation. I agree with this in principle but I had some difficulties with the book. First, the title is misleading: very few of the authors of the fourteen works selected could, by any stretch of the imagination, be called ‘contemporary novelists’. Similarly, can Robert Alter, David Brown or Larry Kreitzer be given the title ‘theorist’? The book is indeed very comprehensive, indeed, to my mind, includes too much material so that it is hard to identify and follow the patterns of thought that unify the book. This is probably due to the fact that the thesis, which no doubt was very original and interdisciplinary, does not easily migrate into a unified and readable book.

That said, however, the book has a number of great strengths: it introduces the reader to a several fascinating links and cross-references between literary works (some well-known and others not so) that have biblical themes and characters as their main focus. It also draws attention to the relevance of some postmodern theological approaches to biblical reception history. Most of all, Swindell’s book offers the reader a sound survey of the literary context of the late twentieth century. The book, with all its detailed footnotes and references, should certainly be enormous benefit to students whose research areas lie in the reception history of the Bible. But, in my opinion, its usefulness is as a source book rather than as a book one would read through at one sitting.

*Martin O’Kane*

*University of Wales, Lampeter*

## **Old Testament**

### **1 and 2 Chronicles**

John Jarick. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Hbk. (£35) and Pbk. (£15).

These volumes are part of a re-issue of the *Readings* series originally commissioned by Sheffield Academic Press. The aim of that series was to provide a relevant and nuanced commentary on the biblical material which would also be accessible to a wide audience.

The first volume of the commentary sets out the overall aim of the books which is to read Chronicles as Annals and to do so without the lens of the Deuteronomistic treatment of the same subjects, the kings of Judah from Saul to Zedekiah, being given priority. Jarick provides an overview of the genre of genealogy as found in 1 Chronicles 1-9 and then proceeds to give short commentaries on the characters named, taking one at a time. Thus he builds up a perspective on the overall schema used by the Annalists to shape their historiography.

Chapters 10-29 of 1 Chronicles are devoted to the presentation of David. Jarick argues that the book is split into Adam to Anani/ David/ post David – thus giving central place to David's rule. Saul is dismissed by the Annalists as being unfaithful and thus bringing about his own downfall. In this context David emerges as a 'golden ideal' ruler. The Annalists deal with the promises to David as well as the fulfilment of these commitments, in chapters 17-18. Jarick notes the manner in which certain literary *topoi* re-appear in this section of the book. The theme of the threshing floor is found both in chapter 13 and chapter 21. The usage links the threshing floor as the place where punishment ceases with the temple project. The cause of the census, the event which leads to disaster, is discussed in relation to the word 'adversary' in the text. This might imply a supernatural figure such as 'The Satan' but could as easily refer to bad advice more widely.

The second volume of commentary moves on to 2 Chronicles, starting with a very thorough and helpful survey of Solomon's temple and the role of temples more generally. The reader is encouraged to reflect on the manner in which Solomon's temple building functioned and its contribution to society. This sets the scene for a build up of Solomon as the great king responsible for the construction of this key sacred site. Jarick notes that this material provides the high point of the Annals since from then on the picture is of a steady decline among Judahite kings, even though there are moments of respite in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. The review of later kings, from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, takes up chapters 10-36 of 2 Chronicles. Jarick bases his reading of this material in the wordplay in the biblical material between a royal name and the acts of that king. Thus Abijah is shown to be fatherly and Asa as a healer. Among the last kings Josiah emerges as 'the healer' and Zedekiah as Righteous. It is noteworthy that David is not treated this way, but stands apart, with no ironic twist given to his name.

These two volumes of commentary are clearly written, following the line of the biblical text but offering an analysis of what lies beneath the surface. Thus what emerges is a literary treatment of what may have been original 'king lists'. Jarick notes Deuteronomistic parallels where this is helpful. His treatment produces an accessible and readable profile of what can seem to the modern reader to be dull and boring historiography. He summarises the material found in these Annals as books of beginnings which represent a look back to a legendary past and a yearning for a brighter political and cultural future. It is within this framework that the stories offered moral paradigms of government which readers could then internalise. Each volume has a robust bibliography which leads the student to key works of contemporary scholarship.

*Mary E. Mills*

*Liverpool Hope University*

**Daughter Zion Talks back to the Prophets. A Dialectic Theology of the Book of Lamentations**

Carleen R. Mandolfo. SBL Semeia Studies 58. Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2007.

Mandolfo here takes further the exploration of the Book of Lamentations started in earlier volumes. Her aim is to create a specific methodology which can then be applied to an inter-textual approach to the marriage theme in Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, alongside Daughter Zion in Lamentations. The central aspect of her method is to draw from the texts the voices of the speakers: prophet, God and woman. Once these voices can be identified in the text the dialogic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin (along with the ethical approach of Martin Buber) can be brought into play. Mandolfo uses dialogism to provide a basis for inter-textual reading of the selected biblical books. The prophetic material sets out a fixed patriarchal profile in which God becomes the husband who has control over the wife. This is not simply in terms of marriage law but also within the text since woman does not speak for herself but is spoken by the male voice. By contrast Zion's voice of lament provides a means by which woman can have voice and can point out her perspective on how she has been treated by the dominant male characters. In the first chapter of the book Mandolfo establishes her method, passing from literary theory to postcolonial studies to the nature of metaphor – here that of marriage.

Having thus established her reading method Mandolfo turns to a detailed examination of relevant passages from the prophetic texts, so delineating the male viewpoint within biblical material. The next chapter offers a

counter-balance to this via a textually detailed approach to the book of Lamentations. These opposing voices are then critiqued via material from Second Isaiah which, on the surface, provides a male tenderness towards the battered wife. Mandolfo treats this material with a hermeneutic of suspicion since the tendency of the narrative voice is towards the submissive nature of the people and the authoritarian power of the deity. This leads to a final chapter on the significance of a dialogic reading, which Mandolfo argues helps the reader to appreciate the ‘voicelessness’ of the female character and even to provide a space in which woman can speak herself.

This book is clearly written and robustly organised. It will interest all readers who wish to explore the value of inter-textual methodology in biblical exegesis.

*Mary E Mills*

*Liverpool Hope University*

## **New Testament**

**Boundless Love: The Parable of the Prodigal Son and Reconciliation.** Joel W Huffstetler. New York: University Press of America Press, 2008. Pbk. Pp.77.

This short book assembles a large amount of material on the current scholarly consensus about Luke 15:11-32 in a remarkably small space. Part One of the book is a mere twenty-seven pages long and is divided into an Introduction and four chapters: three on the three main characters, the Prodigal Son, the Father and the Elder Son, and then a treatment of the parable in broad outline. There is a host of citations brought together to explain the human and social impact of this story in Jesus’ world and the reader is left with a very vivid picture of how the behaviour of the three major characters would have looked to the Gospel’s original audience. Briefly, the pride of the two sons is identified as being of an essentially similar type of rebellion and the compassion and forgiveness shown by the Father is highlighted as being utterly exceptional in that it relies on a boundless love unlikely to be experienced in the world. The Father as God is effortlessly shown forth here.

Part Two repeats the shape of the first part, but here each of the figures is examined in the context of what they tell us about reconciliation. Huffstetler’s book uses all this material to move towards the thesis that Christianity as lived out in the world must have reconciliation at its very

centre: the Word made flesh reconciles God and humanity and the followers of the Word are therefore to be reconcilers through the exercise of forgiveness and humility. One could consider the second part of the book as being a meditation on the parable seen in the light of "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This is not just meant to apply to the idea of personal sin but to show that all sin disrupts the community and that reconciliation is of vital importance between individuals in communities and between all other communities sundered by hate and division:

Sadly, too often within congregations, Jesus' unambiguous desire for a community based on love does not square with the reality of the congregation's experience of disunity. The need for reconciliation among Church members is evident at local, regional, denominational, and indeed, at international levels. It is indeed sad that so often life in the Church does not reflect Jesus' "new commandment" to love one another in his name (p.34).

Each of the three major characters shows forth a different aspect of this: the Prodigal teaches that just asking for help – even when the motive for the request is not exactly selfless – is sufficient to receive the boundless love of the Father. The Elder son is a warning against internalised resentment and the bitterness that denies this love. The Father, in his immense understanding, compassion and humility, is the clearest revelation of the true God preached by Jesus – the very antithesis of the distant and jealous lawgiver of much human imagination.

In the conclusion to the book there are so many citations that sum up Huffstetler's homiletic intent that we have an embarrassment of riches. Desmond Tutu is, for example, quoted as having only one sermon "...that God loves us freely as an act of grace [and] that we do not have to impress God for God to love us as a reward". And this is followed immediately by a quotation from Basil Hume that asserts "...few thoughts are more exhilarating than the realisation that God is Love and that he has for each person an intensity of love which no human experience of love can match" (both on p.58). This is the reason that such a short book manages five pages of bibliography and 135 references to other works. Huffstetler cannot be faulted for the breadth of his research.

*Boundless Love* is both a work of scholarship and spirituality. It is written in an attractive and easily assimilated style and I have no hesitation in recommending it to the readership of Scripture Bulletin.

*Colin Fortune*

*Newman University College, Birmingham*

**Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics.**  
Richard A. Burrige. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK:  
Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xxi + 490.

When the more seasoned of us received our training, biblical studies tended to be a relatively sanitized discipline. Some notice was taken of the needs of the various believing communities, of course, and this probably featured more strongly in the additional formation offered to those whose responsibilities would include preaching. On the whole, however, there was a risk (often the reality) that concentration on the historical critical method would lead some of us, in our fascination with the text itself, to be less than socially responsible. In offering to our own students our small pearls about what a given text might have meant in its historical context (or, more often than not, what it could *not* have meant), we have sometimes put insufficient effort into articulating our deeper convictions of the mysterious life-giving aspects of Scripture that drew us to studying it in the first place and that have kept us doing so over the years. There is now a rising tide of voices that form a corrective to that situation: authors who engage explicitly not only with the religious context in which biblical books were written but also with those in which they were transmitted and are currently read by ‘ordinary’ readers. The book under review is a fine example of such an enterprise.

The key to Richard Burrige’s thesis is that moral living involves the imitation of Jesus in response to ‘his preaching of the eschatological in-breaking of the reign of God’ (p.48), a response that must take place in an inclusive community of believers. The author is here developing his earlier work on the biographical genre of the gospels (chapters I and II). There follows a chapter on Paul and on each canonical gospel (chapters III-VII). In these, Burrige examines the writer’s particular Christology, the setting and eschatology of the book, attitudes to law and love in it, and what can be learned about issues clustered around sex, money and violence. Each chapter concludes with a sketch of what ‘imitating Jesus’ would entail for that biblical author. In the final chapter, the South African experience of apartheid functions as a test case and challenge to reading the New Testament.

There is here something for everybody. Readers of this journal and post-graduate students might want to read the whole book, even though they will find much that is familiar in chapters III-VII. These are, however, the sections that could be of particular help to undergraduates or to more general readers wanting to gain an initial sense of how the work of Paul

or of a particular evangelist relates to Christian living. Throughout, Burrige presents and thoughtfully assesses the most influential previous attempts at clarifying New Testament ethics. The chapter on apartheid should be required reading for anyone who needs reminding of the ambiguous nature of biblical interpretation, even within a believing community, and the final page of text (p.409) provides the most delightful ‘aha!’ moment, when Burrige points out that ‘the one thing which the pro-apartheid theology did NOT do’ was to imitate Jesus. Quite so – and a point on which to ponder.

*Patricia M. McDonald, SHCJ*

*Ushaw College, Durham*

### **Q, the Earliest Gospel.**

John S. Kloppenborg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. Pbk. Pp.x + 170.

For its size this is one of the most important books I have studied recently. Kloppenborg is an acknowledged master in the field of Q, one of the three editors of the *Critical Edition of Q*, which is printed as a 20-page appendix to this volume. The book bubbles with ideas, but is a calm and mellow production, duly considering all the arguments, and well aware that there is a small but vociferous school of thought which holds that Q never existed.

First Markan priority is established, then the proof given that Q must have been a written, literary source. The opposing view of the Goulder-Goodacre school holds that Luke is dependent on Matthew as well as Mark. This theory is shredded, on the grounds (sturdily rejected by Goulder) that Luke would have had systematically to strip out any additions to Mark made by Matthew (p.30). The other strong argument of Goulder-Goodacre, the spider’s web of minor agreements between Matthew and Luke, is similarly rejected: there are only three problematic minor agreements, which are solved by appeal to a proto-Mark, to which minor additions were later made (p. 38).

The way is now clear for a reconstruction of this Lost Gospel. This meticulous work is too detailed to assess in a review; it must suffice to say that I missed the careful and satisfying arguments, given in Kloppenborg’s previous *Excavating Q*, for the grouping of the material into separate discourses. Running through the book is the contention that Q can be called a gospel, despite its lack of any account of the passion and resurrection (but allusions to it in Q14.27 and 13.35). To refuse the

title of ‘gospel’ to Q is, argues Kloppenborg, to neglect the diversity of Christian origins. The emphasis on the cross and resurrection is Pauline, while Matthew and James stress the importance of Torah, the synoptics stress miracles, and the *Gospel of Thomas* holds that salvation consists in the correct understanding of the sayings of Jesus. Q’s Jesus is not a dying and rising god, but a sage of uncommon wisdom (p. 121). Q simply lacks the geographical framework derived from Mark. It is hostile to towns, and centres on the villages of Galilee; it contains no disputes with Pharisees about Sabbath or clean food, no mention of gentiles; its concerns are with debt, small transactions, moths, eating, treasure found. Q is similar to the *Gospel of Thomas*, sharing with it one-third of Q’s 114 sayings, but it lacks the editorial bits of *Thomas*, so is more primitive (p. 109).

Why, then, did Q disappear? Kilpatrick thought there was simply no need for it to survive, as it had been full copied into Matthew and Luke. Dunn suggests that it was not copied because most Christians did not regard Q as a gospel. Kloppenborg suggests that it simply was not copied in Egypt (p. 101), where almost all our early manuscripts originate, preserved by the dry climate.

This is an exciting little book, both for its technical skill in argument and for its theme of the wider background of Christianity. To what extent should these wider tendencies, which later withered away, be considered Christian? What we now hold as Christian orthodoxy was laid down by Irenaeus, as spokesman of the late second century Church. Could it have been different?

*Henry Wansbrough*

*Ampleforth Abbey*

### **The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts. A Reassessment of the Evidence.**

Patricia Walters. SNTS Monograph Series 145. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Hbk. Pp.238.

This study, originally a PhD dissertation submitted to Loyola University in Chicago, offers a challenge to the prevailing view that Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same person. The authorial and theological unity of the two books has been part of the dominant orthodoxy within New Testament scholarship for several decades, given the extent of the similarities they share in terms of structure, theological outlook, and the way in which key characters are

presented, but an emerging desire to probe this consensus more deeply is evident in recent studies such as Mikeal Parsons and Richard Pervo's *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (1993, Minneapolis: Fortress). Walters approaches the question of authorship by undertaking a statistical analysis of the style of several sections of both Luke and Acts, concentrating exclusively on what she terms the "seams and summaries". Since these texts are widely attributed by commentators to the hand of the author, this principle of selection enables Walters to avoid the potential difficulty of analysing passages which may be regarded as reflecting the language and structure of the author's sources rather than his own style. However, they tend to be very short, often only one or two verses long (e.g. Lk. 2:40; 9:51; 17:11; Acts 1:14; 4:4; 19:20), although some slightly longer passages, especially from Acts (e.g. Acts 2:42-47; 5:12-16), are included in the analysis.

Detailed studies of the vocabulary and style of Luke-Acts have of course, been undertaken before, notably by Cadbury, Turner, and Neiryck and Segbroek, for instance. Walters argues that her approach differs from this previous work in two important respects: firstly, she suggests that earlier scholars paid insufficient attention to the differences in the Greek style of Luke and Acts because of their underlying presupposition that the texts share a common author. Secondly, she takes as the starting point for her investigation the conventions of ancient Greek prose composition, as these can be recovered from the discussion of literary or rhetorical style in the works of Hellenistic writers such as Aristotle and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Thus, Walters attempts an analysis of features such as the order in which the subject/verb/object are placed in a sentence, prose rhythm (the extent to which strings of long syllables are used, for example), dissonance, or the use or avoidance of clashing vowel sounds. Her conclusion is that very significant differences between the style of the Gospel and Acts are revealed through this investigation, a result which has obvious implications for theories about the unity, authorship and dating of Luke-Acts.

Walters' own writing style is uncomplicated, and the logical structure and clear focus of this study make her argument easy to follow. Dense statistical analysis, including tables and numerical calculations, does not, however, always make for enjoyable reading. It is debateable whether she has sufficiently proved her case here, or if the body of texts on which she has worked is really large enough to draw definite conclusions. Nevertheless, it is always good to see new approaches being brought to bear on the illumination of old certainties, and this book should certainly make the reader pause to consider afresh how far differences in both style

and theology between Luke's Gospel and the Acts may have been underplayed by New Testament commentators because of the long-standing assumption of their single authorship.

*Susan E. Docherty*

*Newman University College, Birmingham*

**The Healer from Nazareth: Jesus' Miracles in Historical Context.**

Eric Eve. London: SPCK, 2009, Pbk. Pp. xxi+194.

Here is an excellent book, from a distinguished Oxford teacher of New Testament. It has grown out of his doctoral thesis, but is aimed at a non-academic audience, just the sort of people who might be anxious about current questing for the historical Jesus, perhaps fearful that nothing is left for them to believe in, after the quest is over. It is probably fair to say that if they read this book not all their anxieties will be allayed; Dr. Eve does not think that the 'anomalous', or 'nature' miracles took place as described, but he offers nevertheless a good line in understanding what is going on when the evangelists tell stories of Jesus walking on the water, calming the storm, or feeding the multitudes.

The Introduction is an eminently sensible piece of work, giving a good account of what we mean by miracle; 'a strikingly surprising event, beyond normal human capacity, believed to be a significant act of God' is his heuristic definition. Eve makes the important point that the word 'miracle' is not a New Testament idea: the Synoptics speak of 'powers' and the Fourth Gospel of 'signs'; a further important point is that as part of our critical investigation into the historical Jesus we should ask why Jesus made that particular impression on the traditions about him. Eve's view is that the best explanation of the evidence is that Jesus was indeed a healer and an exorcist, and that even if some miracle-stories are 'anomalous', it will still be necessary to explain how they got into the tradition.

The first three chapters perform an excellent job of filling in the cultural background, using both the contemporary evidence (Josephus and Philo in particular) and the results of social scientific approaches. One of the difficulties that besets historical Jesus investigation is that the surviving Jewish literature is the work of the educated, who on the whole are uneasy with miracles and the like, and therefore are happier to report the kind of things that are safely in the past, such as the remarkable events that form part of the Exodus story, than contemporary tales of thaumaturgy. Eve points out that Jesus is unique in contemporary Jewish

literature, in that he is the only figure of whom a whole series of healing miracle-stories, and a whole series of exorcism-stories, are narrated. Inevitably that would have raised the question of whether it was miracle or magic, which is alluded to in Mark 3:20-29. There is no parallel at all in contemporary literature to Jesus' claim at Matthew 12:28 that exorcism is a sign of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God; and the often-cited parallels in Graeco-Roman literature, Asclepius and the like, turn out to have not very much substance to them, since they centre more on shrines where healing took place than on charismatic miracle-workers (apart from Josephus' well-known story about Vespasian, which may have quite another origin). In the third chapter, Eve looks at the sociological question of what role someone like Jesus, a healer rather than a doctor, might play in society.

Chapter 4 offers a helpful account of our sources for Jesus, and the relative paucity of materials outside the gospels; it is significant, Eve argues, that the evangelists report healing miracles, but do not make very much of them beyond the comment that 'the Kingdom of God is among you'. Our author finds no evidence at all of a later tradition of inventing miracle-stories. In chapter 5, there is an excellent account of how Mark reports Jesus' thaumaturgy; Mark wrote first and has the highest proportion of miracle-stories, and if you took those stories out of the Second Gospel, it would look alarmingly thin. Eve looks first at the surface logic of the stories, then at their deep 'grammar', their symbolic meanings. I strongly recommend this chapter to readers just starting to grapple with this issue; it may be better not to spoil it by revealing its conclusions, beyond saying that Eric Eve makes the important point that the nature miracles (which only disciples witness) seem to be saying something about Jesus' identity, while the healing miracles have to do with his authority (an important word for Mark), his ministry and his mission.

So, the reader asks fretfully, was it all true? Some of it must have been, says Eve. The evangelists were talking about a particular person, and their audiences would not have tolerated much deviation from the tradition; Mark is clearly using traditional material, even though, equally clearly, he has a theological agenda in shaping the material. Eve sees Jesus as a non-violent prophet of God's imminent inbreaking, who is a master of symbolic actions to express what God is doing, a promise to the poor rather than a threat to the powerful (in a sense, you can't have one without the other, of course; but Jesus seems to have aimed his message mainly at the poor, for whom his healings and exorcisms would have been decidedly reassuring). On the whole, Eve, as we have indicated,

does not believe that the nature-miracles happened as they are reported; he makes the assumption that anomalies of that sort do not happen, as we could not otherwise tell 'sense from nonsense'. His view is that the feeding- and sea-miracle stories may well have their source in the memory of particular events (for example a boat-trip in a storm), embellished by meditation on Old Testament stories, such as those in the Exodus narrative or the Elijah cycle, or the Jonah tradition, to which Matthew and Luke make explicit though different reference, and the memory that Jesus did indeed do remarkable things.

Eve gives a similar account of stories of raising the dead, and concludes that it is important to distinguish between miracles and 'anomalies', that we must ask what miracles would have meant to Jesus' contemporaries. Certainly, Eve justly points out, if you cut out all miracle-stories, then Mark's portrait of Jesus is changed beyond recognition; and it is important to set all these anecdotes into the context of Galilean peasants trying to cope with a decline in living standards caused by recent urbanisation, for whom Jesus' healings may have symbolised the inbreaking of the Kingdom. In the end, the author argues, it is simply impossible to say 'what actually happened', only what plausibly might have happened. What he is trying to do is construct a model for interpretation, neither asserting nor denying the truth of certain propositions about Jesus. Now to construct a model you have to operate on the basis of assumptions, such as that 'anomalous' miracles simply do not occur; but it is always possible to question such assumptions, and readers are left at liberty to construct other models. Historical enquiry cannot tell us whether God was at work in Jesus (or indeed, presumably, whether Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee). As Eric Eve points out, it all depends on your theological starting-point; and, of course, the ability to perform miracles is not identical with being God incarnate. In the end, this book's argument 'supposes the general reliability of one aspect of the Gospels' portrait of Jesus', which is reassuring, but still leaves us with all the work to do. This is a book to be widely read.

*Nicholas King SJ*

*Campion Hall, Oxford*