

Biblical Studies Bulletin

Edited by Richard S Briggs—Published Quarterly—Read Religiously—Disposed of Reluctantly—Free to Grove Biblical Subscribers

Contents ————— Issue 61: September 2011

- 1 *NEW RESOURCES* Reading Online
- 2 *NEWS AND NOTES* The slowest blog in the biblical studies world
- 3 *BOOK REVIEWS* Textbooks, commentaries, pastoral handbooks...they're all here

New Resources —————

Reading Online

The shape of publishing is undoubtedly changing. More and more books are available to read online, and the Kindle phenomenon is making instant access seem normal. Whether academic publishing can or will go down this route is hard to foresee. But one significant issue which the changing possibilities open up is the question of offering resources free of charge around the world outside the well-stocked theological libraries of the West. The Society of Biblical Literature's new series, 'International Voices in Biblical Studies', is set to pioneer online free publication of scholarship particularly relevant to resourcing non-Western biblical studies. Its first volume is available online: Knut Holter and Louis C Jonker (eds), *Global Hermeneutics? Reflections and Consequences* (IVBS 1; Atlanta: SBL, 2010; pp ix + 93; online; ISBN 9781589834774; £0.00). It is formatted as per any standard SBL book, and unlike much online publication retains the peer-reviewed academic quality of other published work. In format and intention, then, this is a significant and worthwhile venture which may give many other publishers pause for thought.

As to the actual quality and contents of this first volume, it is something of a cultural and stylistic mix which will probably be of somewhat marginal interest to the average BSB reader. It is in fact a collection of papers from the 2007 IOSOT conference in Slovenia, with six contributors, half from South Africa (though one also works in Germany), two others from Africa, and one from Costa Rica (offering a useful study of land in Latin American perspective). This makes 'Global' in the title a little optimistic. The articles range somewhat haphazardly over surveys of where African OT scholars get their PhDs from, to German exegesis regarding violence against women, and some case studies of translating the OT into the vernacular in Tanzania. A closing essay reflects helpfully on what it means to talk of 'global' reading in our complexly globalized world. Engaging as these essays are, it is the overall publishing concept which attracts attention. There can be little doubt that there is more to come in this area.

(Note: On the same day I wrote this review I subsequently learned that in fact a printed copy of this book is now available from SBL for \$19.95. Perhaps there is still something that makes people want a hard-copy edition even when all the content is free online?)

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham University

News and Notes

Around 900 people descended upon London this past July for the International Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL) meeting, held at King's College around the South Bank area, and celebrating in part the 400th anniversary of the KJV. This was one of the largest ISBL meetings, indicating perhaps a growing trend towards gathering biblical scholars all together in Europe rather than the large number of more focused conferences which have been typical in the past. Highlights included several sessions on the KJV, of which your roving reporter got to one: Robert Alter talking about poetry both Hebrew and Elizabethan, which he did with a joy and command of detail which was a wonder to behold. Also, Tom Wright launched his new translation of the NT, *The New Testament for Everyone*, with typical vigour and his trademark mix of entertaining anecdotes and running commentary on the Greek. I enjoyed several sessions, but most notably a packed seminar on monotheism and its existence (or otherwise), which had what might be called a 'robust debate' about why so much scholarly enquiry stops at the 6th century BC. The room was packed to the point of every windowsill and floorspace being occupied, and all came back for more after a coffee break. This kind of interaction is the real highlight of a conference such as this. Make a note now of the 2013 ISBL, due to be at St Andrews up in Scotland on 7–11 July.

Publishers hawked their latest and greatest titles in large quantities at ISBL. But in amongst the avalanche of new titles, it is always interesting to note what gets reprinted and offered a new lease of life.

BSB is proud to salute former editor Mike Thompson's *Clothed with Christ*, originally published by Sheffield in 1991, and now reissued by Wipf & Stock: *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011; pb, ISBN 9781610971423, \$32.00)

Not just reprinted but expanded into a second edition is Luke Timothy Johnson's rather excellent *Sharing Possessions: What Faith Demands* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011; pp viii + 170, pb, ISBN 9780802803993, £12.99). This was always my favourite book on the topic of the NT and possessions, and is here reprinted with additional notes in each chapter and a substantive new 'epilogue.' It's slightly odd to commend acquiring another book when that book will challenge all our acquiring, but I remain impressed with the new edition, and its central claim that what and how we own things is a symbol of our faith.

There has been much interest in early and reformation biblical interpretation, with commentary series devoted to each. 2011 sees the launch of a new series, 'The Bible in Medieval Tradition,' looking to bring another historical period into the light for today's readers. The series begins with Ian Christopher Levy (tr and ed), *The Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011; pp xii + 277, pb, ISBN 9780802822239, £22.99). Levy offers a substantial introduction, and then translates six texts dating from the 9th to the 14th centuries: three whole commentaries and three sample chapters.

Book Reviews

Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp viii + 180, pb, ISBN 9780802865908, £11.99)

Volf here joins the ranks of theologians wanting to pursue their theological task in deep dialogue with Scripture. A 40-page opening chapter explores 'Reading the Bible Theologically,' offering an overview of some fairly familiar issues in the current discussion of this topic, which he rightly sees as a welcome and significant development of recent years. For Volf, following Moltmann, 'Scripture is the ultimate source of theology's vigour' (p 12). He has helpful things to say about meaning, stance, other faiths, and the overall theological vision for wise hermeneutics. Five case studies then follow, written at various times over the last 20 years, and generally offering thoughtful and highly illuminating perspectives. The best are two on 'politics.' One is in dialogue with 1 Peter's vision for church life in the empire (where Volf dissents from the simple schema of church or sect to describe Christian engagement with society). The other looks at John's 'dualism' in the context of contemporary 'pluralism.' Here Volf skilfully problematises both terms to show that John envisages a 'peculiar politics' of non-coercive conviction in the midst of counter-claims. There are also fine studies of God's love set in the context of inter-faith dialogue, and (in relation to Ecclesiastes) a look at the 'dynamics of economic progress.' The examples make this book a wise and thought-provoking contribution to the current interest in theological interpretation of Christian Scripture.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S Koppel, *Grounded in the Living Word: The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp xiv + 262, pb, ISBN 9780802863683, £12.99)

Hopkins and Koppel are respectively professors of biblical theology and of pastoral care at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC. In this book they seek to set up a conversation between the Old Testament and contemporary pastoral care. The authors advocate a postmodern and postcolonial approach, in which all voices are taken seriously, within and about the text. In the earlier chapters it seemed that the contemporary agenda was dominating the conversation, and I wondered whether engaging the Old Testament made any difference to the conclusions—we may indeed, for example, find a mirror to modern family tensions in the Jacob and Esau narrative

but it was not clear why the authors were suggesting it was helpful or significant that this was part of the Bible. As the book proceeds, it does seem the biblical text has more weight, for example when the lament psalms are used to offer guidance in how people may grieve losses, or Abraham's plea for Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 grounds the need 'sometimes...to push on behalf of others for forgiveness' (p 191). Only in the final chapter on covenant care community did I find what I had hoped for—creative interpretation of a range of Old Testament texts showing how various aspects of the theme of covenant might illuminate what the church should be today.

Keith Beech-Grüneberg, Diocese of Oxford

John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010; pp xiii + 345, pb, ISBN 9780801039546, \$24.99)

When I first saw this book advertised I thought it was more evidence of the prolific John Goldingay's industry in bringing his incisive analysis of Old Testament texts to bear on wide-ranging theological matters: another whole new weighty volume already? It turns out that in fact it is something of a collection of his previously published papers, reworked and in particular retitled so that they all bear questions as their headings. Thus a dictionary article on 'Covenant' becomes 'What is Covenant?', a piece I have recommended to students before on 'The Bible and Sexuality' becomes 'What Does the Bible say about Women and Men?', and so forth. Altogether eighteen of the twenty five chapters of this substantial book are such older articles, another couple are extracts from his 1986 work, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, and five are new (or at least previously unpublished) pieces. These five look at divine love and wrath (to be weighted in favour of love), 'surprises' (on the openness of God, where Goldingay concludes that God can avail himself of the possibility of not knowing, though he is not afraid of surprises), and more briefly at leadership, family, and same-sex relationships (where he thinks that naturalness does not establish whether something is right or not).

On all these topics, and the many others covered herein, Goldingay is at his best when showing that the church's thinking could profitably be more shaped by reflection on Scripture than it is. Without making a theoretical fuss about it, this book amply demonstrates the powerful relevance of the Old Testament to many practical matters of faith and life.

The style, as one might anticipate, is studiously casual. The Old Testament is called 'the First Testament' throughout, to no particular benefit. It would have been helpful to have a subject index in a book such as this. But these are minor quibbles. This is a valuable collection of essays assembled more helpfully than many such compilations. It will stimulate worthwhile reflection on important topics.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

J Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp xiv + 408, hb, ISBN 9780802825391, £29.99)

This commentary has all the strengths one comes to expect from the NICOT series, with an additional benefit in a more literarily informed reading than is usual in evangelical commentaries. Dearman explores issues of authorship in a 'from the man to the book'

strategy, and works constructively with critical scholarship. But the real richness of his introduction is its discussion of metaphor and other literary strategies which makes for a really informed and active reading experience. It will be useful and rewarding to a committed reader who hasn't encountered this kind of poetics in great detail before, and will give tools which can spill over into reading other prophetic books. I found that his choice to argue for Hosea as 'occasional' rather than 'systematic' was helpful in allowing the integration of narrative, theology and history as a reading strategy. He explores the idea of family and covenant thoroughly and keeps close to textual examples. His use of unglossed words like 'monolatry' means the reader will have to have some background in the area: theological students and preachers will get the most from the commentary.

In short, I found it a very helpful and useful commentary and I have only one criticism, but it is a big one. Dearman chooses to focus on the family as pervasive metaphor in Hosea and in terms of proportion, he's right. But he does not engage extensively with the huge challenge to exegetes and preachers: how to assimilate the experience of Gomer. Dearman has clearly done the reading since the classic discussions on this subject appear on his reading list. He is at pains to point out that the 'shaming' of Gomer was widespread practice in those times. But in a time when domestic and sexual violence is now rightly abhorred, what is to be done with the metaphor of a jealous, violent, revengeful divinity? What can this text say to women?

Overall I highly recommend this commentary as a useful and helpful one on Hosea. But if you're looking for help on how to address what, to many people, is the thorniest issue in Hosea, further reading will be necessary.

Jenni Williams, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

Robert A Spivey, D Moody Smith and C Clifton Black, *Anatomy of the New Testament*, Sixth Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010; pp xxvi + 501, pb, ISBN 9780800697709, £35.99)

This is an attractive and readable introduction to the New Testament by three American scholars. It is not quite as new as it seems; this is the 'first Fortress edition', but the copyright date is 2007. That sets a time limit on the 'suggestions for further reading' at the end of each chapter, but they remain excellent and one of the most useful features of the book.

The focus is on a careful survey of the contents of the NT, highlighting important historical questions about the origins and general background of the texts, but not to the detriment of drawing out their meaning. Black-and-white illustrations and information boxes on topics like 'The Geography and Theology of Jerusalem' enhance the appeal.

The closest comparison for those wanting to consider this as an introductory textbook is the 2-volume *Exploring the New Testament* from SPCK (a revised edition of volume 1 on the Gospels and Acts, by David Wenham and Steve Walton, appeared in 2011). The Fortress volume contains more connected narrative, and has pictures; the SPCK ones contain bullet points, and have suggested essay and discussion questions. Take your pick from two equally professional productions.

Stephen I Wright, Spurgeon's College, London

Richard Dormandy, *The Madness of St Paul* (Chawton: Redemptorist Publications, 2011; pp 99, pb, ISBN 9780852313848, no price)

Since his letters are in the Bible, Christians tend to idealize Paul. He is seen as supremely versatile, responding with fresh yet authentic theology to every pastoral need. But his standards seem unattainable.

This powerful little book argues in the face of this that we should recognize the role played by psychology and experience in Paul's writing. Historians tend to avoid these because they are not subject to empirical proof; literary scholars often prefer the safe surface analysis of rhetoric to the uncertain business of probing its personal origins; theologians fear the removal of Paul from his pedestal. Dormandy acknowledges the role of imagination in his reconstruction of the profound mental disturbance from which Paul was emerging as he wrote the angst-ridden 2 Corinthians. Some aspects of his speculations will invite more assent than others. But as many biblical interpreters recognize, imagination is not to be eschewed, but embraced, if we are to encounter a text's message in depth.

Dormandy presents Paul as a real human being whose experience, and strategies for dealing with it, speak directly to the one in six of us who go through depression at some time in our lives. As we see through the holy glow to the human flaws, we discover that Paul's deepest pastoral gift was perhaps not theological brilliance or rhetorical flexibility, but the wounds which made him one of us.

Stephen I Wright, Spurgeon's College, London

Grove Biblical Series —————

This month's Grove booklet (B61) is by Rob Bewley, *Transforming Conversation: How Jesus Talked to People (Insights from Mark's Gospel)*. How do you react when someone interrupts you? In Mark's gospel, this happens to Jesus time and again, and it shows Jesus' responsiveness to human need. This fascinating study looks in detail at these interactions, highlighting Jesus' attitude to power, to those unlike him, and to friends, strangers and enemies. He offers a clear model of interaction and responsive communication to those who would follow him.

Contributions to BSB should be sent to: Richard Briggs (Editor—*Biblical Studies Bulletin*) at Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham DH1 3RJ (or via email to: richard.briggs@durham.ac.uk). Unsolicited material is welcome, but it cannot be returned.

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