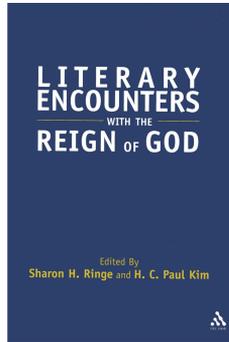


○ REVIEW OF SHARON H. RINGE AND HYUN PAUL KIM (EDS.) *LITERARY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE REIGN OF GOD*

Nathan Eubank, Duke University

Correspondence to Nathan Eubank: nathaneubank@yahoo.com

Nathan Eubank Reviews *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God*, edited by Sharon H. Ringe and Hyun Paul Kim (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004).



Literary Encounters with the Reign of God, a festschrift honoring Robert C. Tannehill, gathers nineteen essays that represent a broad spectrum of interests and methodologies influenced by Tannehill's literary-critical work on the Gospels, especially *The Sword of His Mouth* (1975) and *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (1986–1990). The articles range from quaint exegetical observations to speculations on the fate of the canon in the electronic age, but most share Tannehill's penchant for uncovering fresh strategies for reading the New Testament.

In the first article, 'The Historical Shaping of a Heroic Jesus: Theological Implications', Edgar V. McKnight argues that historical reconstructions of Jesus are indelibly shaped by the assumptions of researchers. Still, McKnight remains optimistic that these historical Jesuses have influenced Christian theology for the better by grounding theological imagination in the concrete specificity of first century Palestine. Mikeal C. Parsons uses Greek fables and *progymnasmata* (schoolboy rhetorical exercises) to shed new light on three Lukan parables in 'The Quest of the "Rhetorical" Jesus', before dangling the suggestion that the Lukan Jesus' rhetorical strategies may extend back to the historical Jesus, an idea that could undermine the form-critical work upon which much historical Jesus research is based.

The next three essays deal with biblical ethics (or lack thereof). In 'Is it with Ethics That the Sermon on the Mount is Concerned?' Charles H. Talbert repudiates a casuistical interpretation of the injunction 'do not resist an evildoer', arguing that the Sermon is a catalyst for character formation. This allows Talbert to subordinate the Sermon, which cannot be read as a collection of commands or laws, to the absolute command to love one's neighbor. Thus, Talbert argues, if a 'neighbor' is attacked by an 'enemy' one ought to exercise neighbor love by attacking the 'enemy'. David M. Rhoads presents a plan for overhauling use of the New Testament in light of ecological concerns in 'Who Will Speak for the Sparrow? Eco-Justice Criticism of the New

Testament'. In his contribution, 'God's Provision for the Well-Being of Living Creatures in Genesis 9', Simon J. De Vries argues that God punishes and blesses all animals along with humankind in the Noah story.

The next four essays deal with the Gospel of Matthew. In 'What are We Teaching about Matthew?' Janice Capel Anderson canvasses the chapters covering Matthew in nine of the leading introductions to the New Testament used in undergraduate and seminary classes and discovers that source and redaction criticism continue to dominate over social-scientific and literary approaches, while feminist and postcolonial criticism remain almost completely neglected. Robert L. Brawley's essay 'Evocative Allusions in Matthew: Matthew 5:5 as a Test Case' exposes the misconceptions of biblical scholars who claim to use Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality as a tool for breaking new methodological ground, when they are actually still doing source criticism (of course, everything sounds more exciting in French: 'ah, but this is not source criticism – it is *intertextualité*'). To clarify the issue Brawley borrows Daniel Boyarin's distinction between a diachronic approach, in which texts are viewed in their temporal sequence, and a synchronic one, in which texts are viewed in a mutual relationship that transcends their temporal sequence. The latter strategy is an intertextual one, whereas the former seeks to understand historical sources and influence. Carolyn Thomas argues that Matthew 13:36-43 is the summary and climax of Matthew's gospel while maintaining that Wisdom is the key element of Matthew's Christology in 'Of Weeds and Wheat: a Literary Critical Study of Matthew 13:36-43'. The ninth essay, 'The Meaning of "Doubt" in Matthew 28:17: A Narrative-Critical Reading' by Fred W. Burnett, convincingly defends a wooden but seemingly absurd translation of the verse in question: 'When they saw him, they worshiped, and they doubted' (172).

In the first of four essays dealing with the Gospel of Mark, 'Markan Narrative Christology and the Kingdom of God,' Elizabeth Struthers Malbon highlights the tension between the Markan narrator who proclaims 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God', and Jesus himself who deflects attention and points not to himself but to God. Whitney Shiner's article, 'Creating the Kingdom: The Performance of Mark as Revelatory Event', attempts to understand how Mark functioned as a performance event rather than as a written text. In the twelfth article, 'Wielding the Sword: The Sayings of Jesus in Recent Markan Scholarship', Sharyn Dowd argues that *chreia* studies ought to be taken more seriously, and co-editor Sharon H. Ringe reexamines the ending of Mark, in 'The Church and the Resurrection: Another Look at the Ending of Mark', suggesting that the rude cut-off of 16:8 sends readers back to the beginning of the Gospel where they discover that Jesus is still with them as he was in those stories.

The following five essays deal with Luke–Acts. Vernon K. Robbins reads the Good Samaritan parable, which he accurately re-titles the Compassionate Samaritan Parable, through a rhetorical lens (as opposed to a rhetological one), focusing on pictorial narration as a means of spurring the reader to enact mercy. In the fifteenth essay 'The Forgotten Famine: Personal Responsibility in Luke's Parable of "the Prodigal Son"' Mark Allan Powell draws attention to Americans' almost universal neglect of the famine in Luke 15, a detail that is pivotal in the readings of many non-Westerners. This unconscious omission, Powell argues convincingly, is a part of a larger and unsubstantiated interpretive scheme in the West that focuses on the consequences of the prodigal's personal wickedness rather than on the father's joyful recovery of his son. Gail R. O'Day combines Tannehill's interests in bird watching and New Testament interpretation in 'There the ? Will Gather Together (Luke 17:37): Bird-Watching as an Exegetical

Activity'. Taking aim at modern interpreters who allow presumed ornithological knowledge to determine the 'correct' interpretation of the text, O'Day argues that eagles (*hoi aetoi*), not vultures, gather where the corpse is. Through a juxtaposition with Diodorus Siculus, David P. Moessner searches for a deeper understanding of Luke's stated desire to write an account that surpasses the attempts of 'the many' in "Ministers of Divine Providence": Diodorus Siculus and Luke the Evangelist on the Rhetorical Significance of the Audience in Narrative "Arrangement". Jeffrey L. Staley took his family on vacation to Baja Mexico where he began a series of musings on Luke-Acts in 'Postcolonial Reflections on Reading Luke-Acts from Cabo San Lucas and Other Places'.

In the final article of the collection 'The End of the Bible as We Know It: The Metamorphosis of the Biblical Traditions in the Electronic Age', Robert M. Fowler argues that the burgeoning electronic age is experiencing 'transmediation', a process in which new media imitate the content of the prior dominant media, in this case those of print culture. Thus, bibles and lexica appear 'on the computer screen just like they do in print' (345), just as early movies imitated printed novels and stage plays, and early written culture imitated the incessant flow of sound of oral culture by writing in *scriptura continua*. The backwards-looking transmediation period inevitably gives way to the demands of the new medium with unforeseeable results. Fowler hastens to point out that no one knows what will happen to our definition of 'scripture' in the electronic age, yet he is confident that the authority of the Bible is already quickly disintegrating as a result of these changes, an assertion that seems as premature as his overall sketch is compelling.

This collection offers an unusually high number of solid articles with interesting overlaps. Readers will, for example, find two novel and unrelated arguments for focusing on the father rather than the son in the parable of the Prodigal Son, with Parsons emphasising ancient rhetoric and Powell detailing Westerners' obsession with the son's supposed personal iniquity. A number of essays undermine the quasi-scientific hubris with which interpreters seize upon the 'meaning' of a text (e.g., Burnett and O'Day).

At its best, this volume continues Tannehill's search for innovative literary approaches to the Bible even when this search undermines hallowed presuppositions in the guild (Brawley and O'Day's articles come to mind). At worst, this volume suggests that literary-minded bible scholars are themselves experiencing something akin to transmediation, as old historical-critical dogmas (e.g., read extra-biblical ancient literature; seek to understand how a text may have functioned in its original milieu; be sensitive to the constraints of genre) masquerade as an interpretive revolution. Essays that are not bound by such conservatism tend to be so self-consciously postmodern they struggle to do much more than assert opinions. Yet, *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God* – a valuable contribution, on the whole – cannot be blamed for the difficulty of kicking old habits.