

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIBLE AND THE BELIEVER: HOW TO READ THE BIBLE CRITICALLY AND RELIGIOUSLY. By Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. New York: Oxford University, 2012. Pp. ix + 210. \$27.95.

The subtitle best suggests the focus of the book, i.e., the “challenges” posed by modern historical biblical criticism for “the believer” who stands resolutely and consciously committed to a religious tradition for which the “Bible” is of much importance. The authors, each a respected biblical scholar, speak from their respective religious traditions: Brettler as an observant Jew, Enns as an evangelical Christian and representative of a Protestant perspective more broadly, and Harrington as a Roman Catholic. Each also acknowledges that modern historical biblical criticism has raised the fundamental question of how the biblical text can be heard as “the word of God” when it has come to be seen, through the critical approaches, as so often being the word of its human authors.

The purpose of B., E., and H. is clearly to draw “the believer” into their conversation, and to that end the introduction provides a general history of biblical interpretation and a more focused account of the emergence of modern historical criticism. The authors clearly “take the term ‘biblical criticism’ broadly to mean the process of establishing the original, contextual meaning of biblical texts and assessing their historical accuracy” (1). Then the conversation begins, with each author writing about the challenges of biblical criticism from his own religious background and the other authors responding. That “the believer” is fully expected to engage in the conversation is clear from the “Further Reading” materials at the end of each chapter, the 16 pages of notes at the end, the five pages of terms in the glossary, and the postscript where the readers are directly addressed.

The “Bible” that is the “core text of Jews, Catholics, and Protestants” (174) is defined differently and functions differently in those traditions. B. makes it clear early on that “the three of us are not talking about the same Bible. For Jews, the Hebrew Bible is the entire Bible” (23). H. further describes the differing definitions of “Bible” for Roman Catholics and Protestant traditions (81–82). Those differing definitions of “Bible” aside, however, the three biblical scholars understand that “biblical criticism” has led to a “dissonance” or disconnect; H. observes that in introductory courses on the OT, “the goals are to read texts in their original historical contexts and to determine as closely as possible the author’s original intention and how the original audience would have understood the text” (167); the issue that then arises is how the biblical text can be

seen as having significance today, how it can speak “religiously” to believers today after such an analysis.

Addressing that issue is seen as an urgent matter. E. notes that “anyone who has taken an introduction to the Bible course at the college level, or has watched the History Channel or PBS, or read *Time* or *Newsweek* around Christmas or Easter, will have been exposed to some broad themes of biblical criticism that challenge conventional Protestant positions. Few with an interest in the Bible can avoid the historical problems” (129). The tension between reading the Bible “critically” or “religiously” is not now restricted to university halls; it is in the public arena and enormously disconcerting to those who insist on the historical reliability of the Bible’s accounts because they are “the word of God.” In this respect the Jewish tradition has an advantage; the Bible has always been interpreted for how it can speak to contemporary situations, and so, while the story has a beginning, it has an openness to the future and to future interpretation (thus B., 162); for Roman Catholics and Protestants on the other hand, the story is brought to a fulfillment and a close with Jesus, and interpretation must focus on that history rather than on the present.

Each author in his major essay addresses a biblical text as an illustration of the difficulties posed by biblical criticism. Each essay also includes a personal statement of how the author was able to move from the critical perspective to a religious appropriation of the text; these personal statements are intensely moving illustrations of “how to read the Bible critically and religiously” (the subtitle). And yet for the believer, “how to read the Bible” is not a finished formula; it remains, as E. notes, for the believer to “commit [him- or herself] to doing the hard work of bringing faith and criticism into dialogue” (159). A number of theological issues are touched on and left to be resolved: revelation (37–40), inspiration (55–56), dynamic equivalence in translation (102), hermeneutical theory (169); to develop them would have blurred the focus.

What remains to be said, then, is this: Those who are “believers” and those who have responsibility for representing their religious tradition to others need to join the conversation about the continued religious significance of the Bible. This book is a fine place to begin.

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LUKE’S WEALTH ETHICS: A STUDY IN THEIR COHERENCE AND CHARACTER. By Christopher M. Hays. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II*, no. 275. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. Pp. xv + 347. €74.

No parts of the New Testament treat the topics of wealth, proper use of possessions, and the perils of excessive attachment to riches as frequently