

Book Reviews

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Borderline Exegesis. By Leif E. Vaage. Signifying (on) Scriptures. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2014. Pp. xii + 206. \$64.95.

Vaage has assembled a fine book revolving around four core essays initially published in Spanish in *Revista de interpretación bíblica latino americana* (1996–1999). While the introduction briefly explains what prompted these essays, the autobiographical chapter found at the center provides more details about this matter by describing the author’s movements from British Columbia to Southern California to Toronto and to Nova Scotia with an especially meaningful time in Lima, Peru. The first essay focuses on God’s answer to Job’s complaint (Job 38:1–41:34). It argues that Job’s former wealth and high social status are responsible for his dire condition. The second essay turns to the Gospel of Matthew’s vision of a different political economy set forth in Jesus’ teaching. This different model reflects on the meaning of “fullness of life” and ultimately suggests being content with what the created world can provide instead of creating greater wealth. The third essay considers the ascetical instruction of the letter of James about the control of one’s tongue to speak true wisdom. The final essay proposes reading the book of Revelation as a case of collective dream work, enabling the text to be seen as interrupting the current nightmare experienced in the daily life of its community of origin.

The amount and diversity of the ground covered in the volume are impressive. The approach adopted in the book is called “borderline exegesis.” V. explains the use of the term “borderline” and “borderlands” as the exploration of “some neglected detail or unacknowledged or under-explored fact or overarching conclusion, which prevailing usage of the space variously has ignored, covered up, not fully or all too forcibly exploited” (12). V.’s work is exegetical, using a number of conventional methods of modern academic historical criticism mostly for their “alienation” effect, that is, their capacity to remind us that biblical texts are the traces of earlier lives and aspirations. V. also explains that these conventional methods are the academic lingua franca of our time.

This is a very rich book. It takes the reader to a point where interpretive possibilities make a real difference in our vision of the world. V. weaves together biblical exegesis and contemporary social issues with a touch of poetry. Each essay can be read on its own, but the progression is better grasped by reading it in the presented order. The first essay raises one’s consciousness of place in the world, the second questions the

dominant economic model and proposes an alternative, the third provides instructions for training oneself in wisdom, and the last points to the location of the interrupters that could spur change in the current political and economic systems.

This is not necessarily an easy book to read. V.'s prose is not always straightforward and can be convoluted. For instance, when explaining "alternate subjectivity" in the third essay, his multiple explanations about the meaning of the phrase are unclear until he makes an analogy with Hegel's master-slave dialectic (110). Notwithstanding this minor problem, the book deserves to become known, read, and discussed. It could be a great resource in theology courses on social justice issues.

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A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative. By Cornelis Bennema. Foreword by R. Alan Culpepper. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. Pp. xviii + 222. \$39.

In this volume, Bennema continues the study of characterization initiated in his 2009 book, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, but now he also focuses on the Gospel of Mark and the Acts of the Apostles. B. aims at presenting a comprehensive theory of characterization that is applicable to all NT narratives. To accomplish this, he employs the dominant paradigm of character reconstruction in the NT that views the characters as modeled in the same way as those of ancient Greek literature (chap. 1). Characters are mostly seen as ethical types subservient to the plot and therefore do not develop in contrast to the characters found in the Hebrew Bible and in modern literature who exhibit a capacity to change. Still, according to the dominant paradigm, modern literary methods are deemed useful for studying NT characters.

In chapter 2, B. argues that this paradigm is flawed. He considers examples of ancient writers such as Aeschylus and Sophocles who portray characters that evolve. B. maintains that modern literary methods are useful for studying ancient characters, assuming that interpreters are knowledgeable of the first-century world and can accordingly locate the characters in their sociohistorical context.

Chapter 3 exposes B.'s model for character reconstruction. It consists of the following: (1) studying a character in its literary and sociohistorical contexts; (2) analyzing and classifying a character according to complexity, development, and inner life, criteria borrowed from Yosef Ewen; and (3) evaluating a character in relation to the narrative point of view and plot with an eye to its contemporary significance. For such a task, which he calls a historical-narrative reading, B. assumes his reader to have a good, but not exhaustive, knowledge of the first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman world in which the NT documents were produced.

Chapter 4 applies the method to Peter, Jesus' mother, the woman with hemorrhages, and Bartimaeus in Mark; to Peter, Jesus' mother, Nicodemus, and Pilate in John; and to Pilate, Barnabas, and Lydia in Acts. This allows B. to compare the portrayals of Peter, Jesus' mother, and Pilate in two documents.