

book's exegetical interpretations are curious if not eccentric. For example, G. maintains that in Mark's account of the Last Supper the "covenant" refers to the personal covenant made by God with Jesus rather than with the people (p. 359). In the Marcan Gethsemane scene, according to G., Jesus is not praying that God spare him from suffering and death, but for an assurance from God that when he dies his name and work will be preserved by his followers (p. 214). When Jesus says "I thirst" while dying in John's Gospel, G. interprets it as Jesus giving his executioners an opportunity of gaining merit (based on Prov 25:21-22) by accepting the wine they offer (p. 318). Peter's request in John that Jesus wash him entirely and not only his feet, G. sees as one of anger (pp. 311-12). More convincing are G.'s perceptive insights regarding the social dimension of Christ's death and resurrection for the Pauline communities.

The book is marred by a disturbing number of misspellings and typographical errors; entire lines are duplicated on pp. 169, 216. Because of its length and repetitious character, the book makes for rather tedious reading in places. And despite its attempt to be thorough, some of its exegetical discussions seemed somewhat superficial to this reviewer. But if one is willing to overlook its flaws and persevere in reading it, this is an often informative, illuminating, and thought-provoking work by a seasoned scholar.

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MARTIN HENGEL, *The Johannine Question* (tr. John Bowden; London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989). Pp. xvi + 240. \$24.95.

This is a very good book written in a very sharp style from a very traditional theoretical standpoint. The title accurately summarizes Hengel's main task: a comprehensive interpretation of the Johannine corpus (formally defined as consisting of the Gospel and the three Letters attributed to John, in their present form, but ultimately including the Apocalypse as well) in terms of four central questions: when, where, by whom, and in what circumstances the various components of this corpus were written and circulated in the mainstream church. It is a task that ultimately takes the author well beyond these four questions to address a myriad of issues and positions within Johannine scholarship.

The mode of discourse borders on the combative and the polemical. The author undertakes a frontal attack on what he perceives as the dominant tradition in modern Johannine research—a "literary criticism" characterized by "ahistorical nirvana" and an "almost chaotic hubbub" of sources and redactions, authors, and editors. This attack is accompanied throughout by ironic and biting asides on "progressive" and "modern" interpreters. The implicit ideology of the work is clear: instead of providing a critical evaluation of scholarship in terms of theoretical standpoints and reading strategies, the volume sets out to rescue the Johannine corpus from the morass into which most of its interpreters have dragged it for the greater part of this century.

The thesis is well developed, well integrated, and well argued. Given its breadth and complexity, I can only reproduce here its main lines, with a specific focus, following the author's own terminology, on its less speculative aspects. First, from the point of view of methodology, the thesis proceeds from the later to the earlier stages of the Johannine tradition: from the presence and reception of this literature in the second century (chap. 1), to the figure of John the elder in 2 and 3 John (chap. 2), to the split in the elder's school documented in 1 John (chap. 3), to the elder and the school as reflected in the Gospel (chap. 4), to concluding historical observations regarding both the elder and his school (chap. 5). Such a development provides H. with a fundamental point of departure: not only is the influence of the Johannine corpus in the mainstream church quite dominant in Asia Minor and beyond in the second century, but also such evidence points to one towering figure, John the elder and disciple of Jesus.

Second, from the point of view of reconstruction, the thesis is filled out as follows. (1) The elder, an eyewitness of Jesus and a mediator of the original tradition, was active in Ephesus from 60/70 to 100, where he was the head of a very important school. (2) Though primarily a master of the spoken word and not a well-trained rhetorical writer, he was the author of all the Johannine works (probably including the Apocalypse as well). (3) His teaching was characterized by a profound dialectical theology with a clear focus on christology: Jesus as true human and true God; in advanced age, he was given the honorific title, "the elder," to distinguish him from the son of Zebedee. (4) The Gospel was written over a period of several decades, serving as the written deposit of this oral christological teaching of the school; its many literary difficulties are best explained as the result of this slow process of composition as well as a number of other related factors, e.g., the oral and dialectical nature of the teaching, the lack of rhetorical sophistication, the elder's advancing age, and the unfinished nature of the manuscript. (5) The Letters were written as a strong defense of this teaching in the face of a perceived threat to the very existence of the school and the Christian tradition; this threat, which led to a severe split within the school, was occasioned by the adoption of progressive christological tendencies from the outside on the part of some of his pupils—a docetic christology emphasizing the divinity of Jesus over his humanity. (6) Both Gospel and Letters are aimed at Gentile Christians with the aim of providing "solid food" concerning Jesus. (7) Upon the elder's death, his pupils edited and published the Gospel, left essentially complete but unfinished by the elder (probably in small parts) and reflecting the antidocetic polemic of the Letters, with possible additions only to chap. 21 and the beloved disciple passages; not long thereafter, the school eventually dissolved. The thesis therefore follows the historical tradition: one message; one author; a towering figure.

The volume's theoretical standpoint is quite traditional, firmly anchored in the historical-critical method; as such, its critique of modern Johannine scholarship ultimately comes out of the same theoretical standpoint and is as a result not as incisive or as effective as it could be. In fact, H. is much closer to the dominant scholarly tradition than would appear at first sight. Literary criticism is understood solely in terms of excavative concerns. Texts are perceived as faithful windows to reality rather than as rhetorical and ideological products in their own right. Texts, including narrative, are seen as essentially univocal in meaning and function, with both perceived

as objective and recoverable. Authorial intention plays a central role throughout with regard to both meaning and function. History is primarily conceived in terms of intellectual positions and debates. Interpretive models, both social and literary, are invoked and employed without proper analytic elaboration (e.g., sect, school, school language). Recent interpretive discussions and developments are bypassed, e.g., an acknowledgment of narrative unity has little impact on the redactional reading strategy adopted—though one author is posited, the traditional *aporias* are still largely accepted and explained in terms of a synchronic compositional history of the text. In conclusion, H.'s critique is very much in order and the volume does represent a masterful example of the historical-critical method. This is a first-rate contribution to Johannine scholarship. At the same time, both volume and critique are directly hampered by an unreflective and uncritical espousal of the historical-critical method in the midst of a veritable theoretical and methodological explosion in contemporary NT studies.

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BENGT HOLMBERG, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Pp. viii + 173. Paper N.P.

This book is the result of Holmberg's contact with North American work in this field, especially the invitation to give the William C. Winslow lectures at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Chicago, in 1986. It has two stated aims: first, to present the research of the 1970s and 80s; second, "to reflect critically on the value of this type of approach by looking at the actual methodological development of NT sociology and by assessing its limits and benefits" (p. vii). H. explicitly excludes the work of those using anthropology because it is a distinct discipline with its own critical perspective.

After an introductory chapter on the use of sociology in biblical studies, chap. 2 compares the "old consensus" of Deissmann and the "new consensus" about early Christian social status, as led by Judge, Hock, Malherbe, Theissen, and Meeks. H. lists the achievements of the new research: (1) Inductive investigation is more fruitful than deductive. (2) There is insufficient evidence for a full social history of the early Christians. (3) "Romantic proletarian notions have been discarded." (4) The evidence cannot be homogenized from place to place. (5) Each community must be located in its own social environment. (6) Criteria for social level have been refined. (7) Anything asserted about social level applies only to pieces of data, not the whole. Some of these conclusions are self-evident; of some, those working with these methods need continually to remind themselves.

Chapter 3 examines the studies of Gager, Scroggs, Elliott, Meeks, Stark, Esler, Watson, and M. Y. MacDonald, using the millenarian movement and sect typologies. H. shows that scholars who use sect typology in early Christianity do so very



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