

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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James Through the Centuries

Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries

David B. Gowler

Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2014; xx + 340 pp,
hb £65.00 / €75,49; e-book £52.99 / €60.99, ISBN
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SUMMARY

Written from the point of view of reception history, David Gowler's commentary collects many examples of interpretations of the Epistle of James from the early periods of church history to the present day. This commentary fulfils the aim of the whole series well: to present various interpretations of the Bible as well as the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music, and – on occasion – even on film, and thus to invite present day readers to see themselves in the line of a long history of 'responses' to this biblical book.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce commentaire, David Gowler s'intéresse à l'histoire de la réception de l'épître de Jacques et recueille de nombreux exemples d'interprétation de cette lettre, depuis la période de l'Église ancienne jusqu'à nos jours. Il atteint bien l'objectif fixé pour cette série : présenter diverses interprétations de la Bible et considérer son influence sur la littérature, la peinture, la musique et, occasionnellement, le cinéma. C'est une façon d'inviter les lecteurs d'aujourd'hui à se considérer comme appartenant à une longue histoire des réponses à cet écrit biblique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

David Gowlers Kommentar, der von der Perspektive der Rezeptionsgeschichte aus geschrieben wurde, trägt viele Beispiele für die Auslegung des Jakobusbriefes von der frühen Phase der Kirchengeschichte bis heute zusammen. Dieser Kommentar erfüllt auf lohnende Weise die Zielsetzung der gesamten Reihe, nämlich verschiedene Bibelauslegungen zu präsentieren sowie den Einfluss der Bibel auf Literatur, Kunst, Musik und – gelegentlich – sogar auf die Filmwelt nachzuweisen. So werden die Leser von heute dazu aufgefordert, sich selbst in die lange Geschichte von 'Antworten' auf dieses biblische Buch einzureihen.

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The series of Wiley Blackwell Commentaries intends to cover both Testaments from the point of view of reception-history. About 13 volumes are already in print, which discuss each pericope of the biblical books in the order of the book although the comments do not cover each sentence in the text. David Gowler, who holds the Chair of Religion at Oxford College, Emory University, USA, provides an impressive summary of the history of reception of the Epistle of James, gathering a wide range of interpretations of this epistle 'through the centuries',

from ancient times to our own days.

The present volume fulfils the aim of the series: to present the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music and – on occasion – even on film, while also presenting patristic, rabbinic, medieval and modern interpretations. It includes forty-four black and white plates, mainly on how James is portrayed on frescos, icons and paintings.

In a detailed Introduction the aims of the commentary are set out and the key interpreters, whose ideas are frequently reported, are introduced in historical order. These include from earlier times: John Chrysostom, Augustine, Bede the Venerable, Luther and Calvin, and from the more recent centuries: Kierkegaard, Frederick Douglass, Charles F. Deems, Joseph B. Mayor and Elsa Tamez. In the course of commenting on the individual pericopes, many more authors are referred to. In the introduction, Gowler argues (following the views of Mikhail Bakhtin) that 'our own interpretations are incomplete without a dialogic response to the responses of those interpreters who have preceded us' (4-5). The interpretations of the past are like 'polyphony' in music, and polyphony 'can be seen as any environment devoted to the idea that all voices – often contesting voices representing a variety of ideological positions – receive a fair and equal hearing' (4). Gowler also discusses the main views on the identity of James, the author of the epistle, briefly presenting the sources about him in the New Testament, Josephus, Eusebius, the Nag Hammadi writings and the New Testament Apocrypha.

The 'Biographies' section at the end of the book lists 93 authors whose ideas are referred to or quoted in the commentary. These short biographical notes include scholars, preachers and artists from different centuries in alphabetical order, e.g. Thomas Aquinas, Ferdinand Christian Baur, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Bunyan, Geoffrey Chaucer, Meister Eckhart, Jerome, C. S. Lewis, Origen and Charles Spurgeon.

The commentary has a very clear structure. It quotes and discusses its sources under the same headings in each pericope: 'Ancient literary context' and 'The interpretations'. The latter is subdivided in two sections: 'Ancient and medieval' and 'Early modern and modern'. The ancient literary context includes the structure of the pericope, its main themes, its key Greek words (in transliteration) and its relation to the neighbouring pericopes and to the whole of the epistle. In this section, some modern commentators are referred to, although in the whole of the commentary modern commentators do not play a major role.

In discussing the interpretations, Gowler often presents the sources in detail in order to enable readers to make up their own minds; he does not attempt to

favour a particular author. The views collected from the long reception history are not evaluated, only presented in a fair, descriptive way. Gowler often summarises the sources, with short quotations within his own sentences, but he also often quotes the sources at length. He aims to show how the various authors understood the text of James or how they used sentences from the epistle as arguments to support a view they were promoting, or even as arguments in their disputes with others.

The commentary has nine sections with titles, and in each section Gowler discusses several pericopes (with-out further titles). Thus the first major section of the epistles is 1:1-11, entitled 'Trials, Endurance, Wisdom, and the Exalted Poor' and the pericopes in this section are 1:1-4; 1:5-8; 1:9-11. In the first pericope (1:1-4) he points to the fact that the letter's opening words indirectly assume authority (63). The author of the letter does not feel a need to clarify which 'James' he is (64). In this section Gowler emphasises a thesis which is demonstrated throughout the commentary, namely, that although Jesus' name is only mentioned in James 1:1 and 2:1, 'echoes of Jesus' words and teachings permeate the letter' (64). Gowler also points to the presence of the idea of 'joy' in a verb form and a noun form – 'one of many such word-linkages in James' (64).

Gowler mentions many views about the person of James from the 'ancient and medieval' interpreters, as well as the way the book became part of the canon in different regions; he refers, e.g., to Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome. He also gives examples – by means of long quotations and their discussion – of how the Venerable Bede and later Jan Hus applied the first verses of James to trials and persecutions of Christians in their own days.

Gowler presents the views of Luther with the help of extensive quotations, showing how Luther did not regard it 'as the writing of an apostle' (69). He then quotes Calvin's different opinion: 'I am fully content to accept this epistle, when I find it contains nothing unworthy of an apostle of Christ' (72). According to Calvin, the author of the epistle was either James, the brother of Christ (the majority view in ancient times), or James the son of Alphaeus (72). Gowler also shows how in the works of Elsa Tamez – a proponent of Latin American liberation theology, born in 1950 – 'patience' in James is not used 'in a passive or submissive way' (78). Tamez uses the term 'militant patience' to show that in James patience 'arises from the roots of oppression; it is an active, working patience' (79).

The commentary concludes with bibliographical data and indexes of names and subjects. This is a valuable collection of sources to show how the Epistle of James was understood and used in various times and situations. Its many quotations may be used, for example, in Bible study groups and as illustrations in sermons. This commentary complements the 'usual' verse-by-verse commentaries, which evaluate views in the light of the author's own exegesis. The present book helps readers

to see themselves in the line of tradition, yet they have to decide for themselves what the epistle means to them and what way of life is called for by James.

Peter Balla, Budapest

*Bewährung in Anfechtung: Der Jakobusbrief
und der Erste Petrusbrief als christliche
Diaspora-Briefe*

Thorsten Klein

Tübingen, Basel: A. Francke, 2011; x + 496 pp, pb,
€ 78, ISBN 978-3-7720-8405-8

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Doktorarbeit von Thorsten Klein untersucht den Jakobusbrief und 1. Petrusbrief als Briefe, die an die Leser in der Diaspora geschrieben wurden. Klein führt das Konzept der Diaspora ein und stellt dann auch einige der jüdischen Briefe an eine Leserschaft in der Diaspora vor. Er ist der Meinung, dass der Jakobus- und Petrusbrief diesen Briefen in vielerlei Hinsicht ähneln. Die Studie richtet das Augenmerk auf die Versuchungen, welchen die Leser ausgesetzt sind, und konzentriert sich darauf, wie die Autoren den Lesern helfen, mit ihren schwierigen Situationen zurecht-zukommen. Klein zeigt dabei auf, wie diese Strategien auch heute noch relevant sind.

SUMMARY

Thorsten Klein's doctoral dissertation investigates the epistles of James and 1 Peter as letters written to readers in the Diaspora. Klein introduces the concept of Diaspora and then some of the Jewish letters to readers in the Diaspora. He finds that James and Peter resemble these letters in many respects. The study pays attention to the temptation faced by the readers and focuses on how the authors help them to cope with their difficult situations; Klein also shows how these strategies are still relevant today.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cette thèse de doctorat, Thorsten Klein étudie l'épîtres de Jacques et la première de Pierre en tant que lettres adressées à des lecteurs dans la diaspora. Il définit la notion de diaspora et considère quelques lettres juives adressées à des lecteurs de la diaspora. Il trouve de nombreuses ressemblances entre celles-ci et les épîtres de Jacques et de Pierre. Il s'intéresse aux tentations rencontrées par les lecteurs et à la façon dont les auteurs les aident à vivre dans ces situations difficiles. Il montre aussi que ces stratégies sont encore pertinentes à l'époque actuelle.

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Die Adressierung der Empfänger als in der „Diaspora“ in Jakobus 1:1 und 1 Petrus 1 eröffnet einen Komplex an Problemstellungen, denen sich die vorliegende Studie widmet. Sie geht zurück auf eine Doktoraldissertation von 2009 an der Universität Leipzig (Betreuung J. Herzer). Einführend bemerkt Klein: