

(Review by) Peter Balla:

Louise Heldgaard Bylund, René Falkenberg, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Kasper Bro Larsen (eds.): *Nordic Interpretations of the New Testament: Challenging Texts and Perspectives* (Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 5).

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The text provided here below is the same as the text of the printed version, however, not following the line division of the printed version. The page numbers of the printed version are indicated with square brackets in the text below. (We have omitted here the German and the French summary of the review, published only in the printed version.)

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Nordic Interpretations of the New Testament: Challenging Texts and Perspectives

Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 5

Louise Heldgaard Bylund, René Falkenberg, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow and Kasper Bro Larsen (eds)

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Summary

This is a collection of essays written by fifteen Nordic New Testament scholars, which does not have a unified theme. It presents challenges to some widely held positions in present-day New Testament scholarship. The contributions are grouped under three main headings: four under the title 'Text, Translation, and Reception', five under the title 'Gender, Empire, Emotion, and Drama', and six under the title 'Perspectives on Paul and Jesus'. The authors use diverse non-biblical texts or modern approaches in the course of their interpretation.

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This book is a collection of essays written by fifteen Nordic New Testament scholars. They come from Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and among them are

PhD students and young scholars as well as senior lecturers and professors, and also professors emeriti. The volume is intended to ‘challenge New Testament texts and interpretations’ and the authors are also open to being ‘challenged by these texts and by their interpretations’ (7). The introductory chapter by the editors summarises the aims of the volume and also the main theses of each essay. Most of these were first offered at a conference in Aarhus in 2015 and have been reworked for the present edition (12). The volume does not have a unified theme; it brings together essays ‘from the ongoing conversation among and between New Testament scholars from the Nordic Countries’ (7).

The contributions are grouped under three main headings: four under the title ‘Text, Translation, and Reception’, five under the title ‘Gender, Empire, Emotion, and Drama’, and six under the title ‘Perspectives on Paul and Jesus’. In general, we may say that the papers either survey recent developments in some areas, or address very specific issues in certain fields, often proposing ‘challenging’ new hypotheses (on occasion reviving or further developing already existing hypotheses) in diverse areas of New Testament studies. Here we will briefly summarise some of the more ‘challenging’ views and theses in these papers, only as a way of giving examples of the wide range of themes in this volume.

In the first essay, Gitte Buch-Hansen argues for the view that the expression *ta paidia* in Mark 10:13–16 does not refer to children, but to ‘slaves’. The title of her paper reflects this thesis in the translation of the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:14: ‘Permit the Slaves to Come to Me’. Buch-Hansen acknowledges the arguments for the traditional translation, but she proposes that ‘slaves’ fits better the Markan context (9:33–37; 10:42–45). The present reviewer holds that the traditional arguments remain more convincing.

In the second essay, Halvor Moxnes affirms that among the recent approaches in New Testament studies, the social scientific interpretation/criticism offers promising fruits, yet it has to be extended to include the [p. 141] ‘hermeneutics of dialogue’ (44). He holds that Friedrich Schleiermacher’s ‘methodological approaches point forward to the modern use of social-scientific methods’ (52). Moxnes affirms:

With its focus on social groups, social science criticism is interested not just in individuals or in the elite, but in ‘ordinary believers’ as partners in the process of communication. ... To be true to its own perspectives a social science criticism must engage in a dialogue with ordinary, engaged readers (56).

This approach focuses ‘on the *foreignness* of the biblical world’ (55), and in this hermeneutical model ‘it is the *process of interaction* between religious experience and faith that provides the similarity between the past and the present’ (55; italics original).

In the third essay, Gunnar Haaland examines Norwegian lectionary resources from the point of view how they use the term ‘Pharisee’ in modern applications. He concludes that the question in the title of his essay, ‘Who Are the Pharisees of Today?’, should not be asked, because it is ‘a potentially destructive question, one that can only

lead to wrong and potentially destructive answers' (72). The term 'Pharisee' should not even be used to refer to attitudes in Christian circles, because this 'not only distorts the historical picture, but also causes stereotypes and prejudices about the ancient Pharisees and current Jews and Judaism to prevail and reproduce' (72).

In the last essay under the first main heading, Morten Beckmann surveys how the theological views of committee members/translators have influenced the way in which questions of grammar, e.g. the genitive in the Greek text of Colossians 1:15, were dealt with in making some recent Norwegian Bible translations. He concludes that in the long process of the translation, 'predisposition governed the meanings chosen' (96). In the 'Bibel 2011' Norwegian edition, in the translation of the Greek term *prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs*, the avoidance of a partitive genitive 'seems to come from the fear that such a translation would imply that Christ is part of creation' (97).

From the remaining essays we mention here only a few very briefly; however, even from these few examples one can form an impression of how the authors use diverse non-biblical texts or modern approaches in the course of their interpretation of the New Testament.

In the first essay under the second main heading, Martin Friis argues that the Fourth Evangelist 'deliberately depicts Jesus in a manner that corresponds to the established notions of masculinity in antiquity' (121). [p. 142] Friis tries to show, on the basis of parallels in the writings of Xenophon, Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch and Josephus, that 'throughout his depiction of Jesus John consistently seeks to set forth, and at times even to reconfigure, what it means to be an ideal man' (121).

The essays in the third main section address, for example, the issue of the 'radical new perspective on Paul' (Magnus Zetterholm; 193). Jacob P. B. Mortensen argues for the thesis that 'the strong' and 'the weak' are all within the group of Gentile Christians in Romans 14:1–15:6. The final three essays deal with different perspectives on the character of Jesus. For example, Runar M. Thorsteinsson argues that Jesus is depicted as a philosopher in the Gospel of Mark: 'Mark may have associated his ideal human being, Jesus Christ, with contemporary ideas about the ideal philosophical sage' (259).

The fifteen essays in this volume do present 'challenges' to some widely held positions in present-day New Testament scholarship, and their authors expect that others will 'continue the conversation' (as the editors put it; 12). The readers will decide whether they are convinced by the theses presented in this volume; the conversation will undoubtedly go on.

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