

BOOK REVIEWS

General

Biblical Art from Wales.

Martin O’Kane and John Morgan-Guy (eds.). Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010, pp. 328. £35 hbk (ISBN 978-1-906055-67-7); pbk £19.50 (ISBN 978-1-906055-74-5).

A handsome volume with over six hundred colour images and containing a DVD-ROM which further develops the material of the book, this work is a monument to the extraordinary relationship between the Bible and art in Welsh culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It chronicles all styles, from the simplicity of the Nonconformist chapel and Jewish synagogue to the more elaborate art forms of the Churches, both Catholic and Established, and the icons of the Orthodox tradition. The volume and the DVD and the supporting on-line database hosted by the National Library of Wales (<http://imagingthebible.llgc.org.uk>) are a fitting tribute to the work of the research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council based at the University of Wales, Lampeter. The DVD-ROM accompanying this volume expands on several topics explored in the book, such as the interplay of art and faith, biblical imagery in a domestic context and religious military metaphors in war memorials in Welsh churches. The on-line database of images recorded and researched in the course of the research project lists over 8,000 photographs taken as part of the project fieldwork activities. As the Introduction to the book points out: ‘It is intended that all three, this volume, the DVD-ROM and the database should function together to provide a comprehensive resource for those seeking to locate, contextualize and become more familiar with the range and diversity of biblical art in Wales’ (xiv-xv).

After the Introduction, the first three essays in the volume give an exceptional overview to the work as a whole: D. Densil Morgan begins with a brief historical background (1-10); this is followed by an in-depth scene-setting analysis by John Morgan-Guy (11-44). In a wide sweep Morgan-Guy considers art in Wales from the early illuminated manuscripts of the eight century to the imaginative and figurative art of more recent times. The third article (45-70) by Martin O’Kane provides us with a thought-provoking glimpse of what has been called ‘visual exegesis.’ From his own exegetical background O’K. skilfully exhibits how text and image combine to give substance to the Welsh experience of the prominence of the Bible as the *Word* of God. One of the later essays in the book (L.J. Kreitzer, ‘Images of the Apostle Paul in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Wales,’ 235-

252) could be said to belong to this same genre of ‘visual exegesis.’ For example, K. considers the three panels in the 19th century stained glass window in St. Mary’s Church, Lenden Pool, Denbigh: in the first, the shepherds are being urged by the angels to come and *see* the Child at Bethlehem; in the second John the Baptist is urging his audience to *see* the Lamb of God while in the third Paul is preaching to the Athenians (Acts 17:23): ‘In the final panel Paul’s preaching extends to the Athenians what Luke’s angel has already announced to the shepherds and what the evangelist John has proclaimed to his audience through the Baptist’ (240).

The remaining essays can be roughly divided into three categories: a) the art of the various confessions, churches and religions in Wales; b) the work of individual artists; c) the social milieu. Each article is superbly illustrated with relevant material. a) J. Harvey, ‘The Bible and Art in Wales: A Nonconformist Perspective’ (71-90); M. Crampin, ‘Biblical Art from Wales: The Mediaeval Influence’ (121-138); A. Andreopoulos, ‘Icons and the Bible: St. Nicholas’s Orthodox Church, Cardiff’ (253-270); S. Kadish, ‘The Jewish Presence in Wales: Image and Material Reality’ (271-290). b) D. Jasper, ‘Pre-Raphaelite Biblical Art in Wales’ (139-154); C. Rowland, ‘Images of the Apocalypse: Blair Hughes-Stanton (1902-81) and John Hancock (1899-1918)’ (155-170); H. Dentinger, ‘Biblical Imagery in the Engravings of David Jones (1895-1974)’ (171-186); P.E. Esler, ‘The Biblical Paintings of Ivor Williams (1908-82)’ (187-204); N. Gordon Bowe, ‘Interpreting the Bible through Painted Glass: The Harry Clarke Studios and Wilhelmina Geddes (1887-1955)’ (205-216); A. Smith, ‘Light, Colour and the Bible: The Stained Glass Windows of John Petts (1914-91)’ (217-234). c) P. Lord, ‘The Bible in the Artisan Tradition of Welsh Visual Culture,’ (91-120); O. Fairclough, ‘Biblical Imagery in Private and Public Spaces in Wales (1850-1930)’ (291-304).

The final article, C. Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Transformation or Decline? Modern Welsh Artists and the Welsh Biblical Heritage’ (305-317), takes an honest look at the present position with regard to biblical art in Wales. Much traditional biblical art depended on religious patronage. This is no longer as readily available to artists, since patronage now comes more and more from secular sources. Going along with this is the decline in religious observance, with the result that scenes from the Bible no longer have the same resonance for present-day Welsh people as they had for their forbears. Lloyd-Morgan asks the question, ‘Biblical subjects are certainly rarer among practising artists today than ever before. Now that the younger generations lack the thorough, early grounding in the content of the Bible, has the Bible remained a source of inspiration or has it largely been abandoned?’ (308). She concludes that the production of this volume, and the DVD to accompany it, is timely since it preserves the rich heritage of Welsh biblical art before it is

attenuated further. This reviewer concurs and thanks the editors and the many researchers involved for a superb production.

Céline Mangan, O.P., The Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin

Freeing the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Other Adventures of an Archaeological Outsider

Hershel Shanks. Continuum, 2010, X + 251p. ISBN 97814411 52176.

Hershel Shanks has long been the *enfant terrible* or the Socratean gadfly of the biblical archaeological world. His periodical, the *Biblical Archaeological Review*, delights in espousing unpopular causes and pricking widely-revered bubbles. Perhaps his most sustained and notorious campaign has been to expose and terminate the delays in the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The first quarter of the book recounts a desperately conventional story of an American Jewish upbringing, leading to a lucrative post in a US law firm, where the author honed his legal and argumentative skills. A casually-suggested sabbatical in Israel led him into the field of biblical archaeology, one of the first finds discussed being an inscribed handle discovered by the eagle eye of his six-year-old daughter.

In the early 1970s there was no publication for the general reader providing information about discoveries in the Holy Land and the Near East - only learned, dry-as-dust periodicals for the archaeological specialist. What was more, archaeologists since the 1930s had been notorious for long delays in publication of their reports. Shanks (p. 112) calls this archaeology's 'dirty secret'. His own technique has been to pounce on new discoveries and open them up for the interested general reader long before the archaeologists have completed their painstaking analyses and made their final assessments. In 1975 came the birth of the *Biblical Archaeological Review* for this purpose, to spread rapidly to a claimed readership of 200,000. Shanks himself clearly loves a fight and his status as an independent archaeological outsider who has nothing to lose. The campaign with which I have most sympathy is that for the long overdue excavation of the huge and important site of biblical Gezer on the edge of the Philistine plain.

The paradigm case, however, both of archaeological delays and of a *BAR* campaign has been the delay in the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, blazoned by Geza Vermes as 'the academic scandal of the twentieth century'. It is perhaps an exaggeration to claim that the 'substantial mass' (p. 128) of these crucial documents remained unpublished, but the Gollum-like hoarding of a significant

clutch of them by a self-nominated and self-perpetuating cartel of scholars is undeniable. At the heart of Shanks' campaign has been the publication of the theologically significant manuscript named 4QMMT. When he eventually succeeded breaking the monopoly by publishing a samizdat copy of this, omitting to mention the name of one of its editors, Shanks was, after a high-profile legal battle, punitively fined for breach of copyright. He remains rueful but unrepentant. Other on-going campaigns briefly described are for the authenticity of the recently-discovered ossuary labelled 'James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus', and for a vase which is claimed as the only relic of Solomon's Temple. Shanks does not give up easily! These particular cases lead on to a valuable discussion of the highly complex problem of establishing authenticity of inscriptions, and the perils of tangling with antiquities whose provenance is unknown.

The author writes with attractive clarity. He presents his opponents' arguments fairly and almost always generously, admitting his failures as well as his successes. He makes no secret of the fact that he is an outsider to the coterie of professional archaeologists. Nor is he the least abashed by his exclusion.

Henry Wansbrough

Ampleforth

Old Testament

The Consuming Fire: A Christian Guide to the Old Testament. Updated and Revised

Michael W. Duggan

Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2010. Pbk \$29.95

Michael Duggan's *The Consuming Fire* provides a comprehensive guide to the Old Testament. As Duggan states in the Introduction, his book assumes no prior 'systematic study of the Scriptures,' and *The Consuming Fire* is very much aimed at facilitating initial engagement with the Old Testament through illuminating commentaries and reflections. Originally published in 1991 by Ignatius Press, this edition has been revised in light of recent scholarship and Church documents. It has also been rendered more accessible through its referencing chapter and verse in the English Old Testament rather than those in the Hebrew; revisions have also been made in respect of the Bible's Jewish heritage.

Duggan begins with introductory chapters exploring the Tanakh (or Hebrew Bible), the Septuagint, and the history and geography of the Old Testament, and there are further introductory chapters interspersed as appropriate, such as the chapter introducing the theme of prophecy before examining individual prophets. The remaining chapters serve as commentaries on particular texts, covering the whole Old Testament.

Each commentary starts by introducing the theme of the text by relating it to the world of the contemporary reader, touching on issues ranging from international politics to the amalgamation of parishes. The structure of the chapter is then determined by the nature of the scriptural text: some chapters being arranged around sections of the narrative or history (looking at a series of chapters together), and some being explored simply through themes. The result is that otherwise occasionally unwieldy texts are brought to life in manageable parts.

Duggan's book makes a point of placing the subject of each scriptural narrative in its historical context, as well as giving the specific history of each text's composition. To do this Duggan highlights inter-textual relationships and references, enabling the reader to access multiple layers of history and insight into Ancient Israel. A series of tables and charts provides an invaluable tool to further the reader's understanding, for example *The Chronology of the Old Testament Era* and *The Kings and Prophets of Israel*.

Each chapter contains various principles of Catholic teaching, such as an explanation of the term salvation, or an evangelistic encouragement to recognise God's graciousness and love. This is given particular focus, however, at the end of each chapter under the heading of *New Testament Perspectives*. Duggan manages to give both breadth and depth here, providing numerous cross-references in both the Old and New Testament, giving context for the historical Jesus and the development of early Christian doctrine.

As Duggan is not writing for an academic audience, for ease of reading there are no footnotes or references. Instead the Bibliography is arranged in two sections: *General Bibliography*, grouping texts under themes; and *Specific Bibliography*, which is arranged first of all under the chapter headings of the book, and secondly under the New Testament books to which Duggan refers. On occasion, though, the lack of references may be frustrating for readers who find themselves wanting to know more. This is an introductory text, after all, and very much invites further study and reflection. An Index would also have been an excellent addition to such a comprehensive work.

The desire to keep things simple may also have left the *Meditative Reading* sections within each chapter at certain points inappropriately pitched. These sections are aimed at facilitating the first two stages of *Lectio Divina*, reading and reflection, but being asked to get out one's coloured pencils or to 'describe' things seems slightly school-like compared to the weighty content of the book. I would also wonder if Duggan has missed a trick here in not attempting to facilitate the latter stages of prayer and contemplation. In a couple of chapters Duggan hints at this, and had he done so throughout I think it would have suited the holistic tone of the book and the target audience.

I would like to have seen a chapter in the introduction regarding approaches to Scripture; that's the one thing lacking in terms of really introducing first-time students to Biblical Studies. In a similar vein, Duggan's own approach in the commentaries is largely based on historical-critical, social-scientific and (less so) literary approaches, but on occasion it would have been great to hear some other perspectives, in particular possible readings from advocacy criticism.

There were a number of small foibles that might confuse new readers: Duggan refers to both the *New Testament* and the *Second Testament*, without explaining his transition; likewise with the terminology of 'editor' and 'redactor'; whilst on occasion 'Hebrew Bible' is used to suggest the entire Old Testament (including the deuterocanonical writings).

All of that said, I would highly recommend this book. For first-time students it is an exceptional introduction and ongoing reference book, it reads well and is enjoyable. Duggan recommends at the start that it is read alongside the scriptural texts themselves, and should this be done, a reader would have an incredible overview not only of the Old Testament, but of Scripture as a whole. Should readers engage with the book in a parish setting, it would be an excellent basis for group Bible Study, and should the whole book prove to be too great a commitment, it could be used on an ad hoc basis looking at particular texts.

I would suggest that the reach of this book is far wider than its intended audience and as *The Consuming Fire* is effectively a library of commentaries, it would be of value to all Biblical Studies students as well as to clergy for the purposes of homiletics.

Due to the preference for bibliography over referencing, it is difficult to know exactly what of this work we owe to Duggan and what to other scholars. However,

Duggan displays the same skills as the editors that he talks of so frequently, blending source texts and his own thoughts until, to the lay-reader's eye, they are one and the same. In doing so Duggan gives us a fine example of what academic knowledge made available to all can look like.

Emily Duffy

Manchester

JPS Guide to the Hebrew Bible.

The Jewish Publication Society. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008. Pbk. Pp. 291.

This book sets out to provide an introduction and compact reference to the Jewish bible which is based on scholarship without being overly 'scholarly'. In this laudable aim the editors and wide range of contributors have certainly succeeded. The volume offers a concise introduction to biblical narrative, law, poetry, prophetic and wisdom literature, and then a summary of every book of the Hebrew bible, which includes both an overview of the contents and a paragraph pointing out the main theological significance of the book in question. These chapters all draw on modern critical scholarship, so that, for instance, literary approaches to the bible are well represented, there is a very simple account of the Pentateuchal source theory, and Israelite law is compared with the Mesopotamian law codes. Key information is set out in shaded boxes, and resources such as timelines, lists of Israelite kings, and excellent colour maps of the biblical lands are provided. All this might be found in any good standard Introduction to the Old Testament, but this one has the added dimension of being written from a Jewish perspective, so it also explains such things as the work of the Masoretes and the Jewish readings-cycle, and introduces the reader to midrash and to the mediaeval tradition of Jewish bible commentary. This chapter on commentary concludes with some very interesting case studies, in which the views of different interpreters, from Rashi to Robert Alter, about well-known passages such as the Garden of Eden and the Aqedah are compared. Parts of the text are reproduced from other publications by the contributors, especially Marc Zwi Brettler's *How to Read the Bible*.

I would warmly recommend this book. It is beautifully produced, clearly laid out, and easy to navigate. Useful aids to further study, such as a glossary, list of recommended websites and suggestions for further reading are included. This volume is aimed at absolute beginners, so the level is pre-undergraduate, making it a useful resource for parish or CCRS groups, perhaps. However, given the lack of prior knowledge of the Old Testament amongst many of those coming to study

Theology at University, and given also the fact that this book offers an overview of the traditions of Jewish biblical interpretation not found in other Introductions to the Hebrew Bible, I shall certainly be ordering it for my Institution's library and looking out for other volumes in this JPS Guides series.

Susan Docherty

Newman University College, Birmingham

Targum and Testament Revisited. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament.

Martin McNamara. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010. Pbk. Pp. 359.

This is a new edition of McNamara's important work, first published in 1972, and lightly revised to take account of research in the field of targums in the intervening three decades. Part one provides an overview of the targumic tradition, covering such areas as the dating, origins and transmission of the targums, and including chapters on synagogue worship and the development of the Aramaic language. The heart of the book lies in part two, where McNamara looks at possible influences from the Palestinian targumic tradition on the language and theology of the New Testament, considering, for example, the themes of the holy spirit, sin and virtue, eschatology, and the language used to speak of God. There is a particularly illuminating section devoted to exploring parallels between the targumic "Memra" (Word of the Lord) and the Johannine *logos*. The book closes with a lengthy appendix, giving an introduction to all the extant targums, which forms a useful reference for both younger and more established scholars. McNamara's overall approach, then, has not changed since he published his first edition, as he continues to focus on how understanding of the New Testament is deepened by a knowledge of the targums, and his interests lie in a consideration of the targumic texts in the form in which we now have them and in their interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, and not so much in questions of their historical and linguistic development. He usually indicates in this volume where he has modified his earlier position, clearly stating, for example, that he has moved away from arguing for an early date for the Palestinian Targum as a whole, whilst still maintaining that it includes within it much ancient tradition.

This volume is unlikely to have the same impact as the first edition, when McNamara really did shed new light on the study of New Testament by foregrounding the comparative material from the targums, which had until then been the subject of far too little scholarly interest. It is due to McNamara as much

as anyone else that there is now more general awareness amongst biblical scholars of the significance of the targumic evidence. Not a great deal of new material has been added in this edition, and some sections appear to have been written somewhat hurriedly. In the chapter on synagogue worship, for instance, the bibliography has been helpfully updated to reflect major publications since 1972, but the body of the text still relies as heavily as the original on the reference work of Schürer. It was also disappointing to find little familiarity reflected with the most recent German scholarship in this field, such as Arnold Goldberg and Alexander Samely's studies of scriptural exegesis in the targumin. However, McNamara's wide-ranging survey of the targumic texts and his judicious approach to their dating, theology and relationship to the New Testament, mean that this volume will continue to serve as a very informative introduction to the subject and as an important reference point for New Testament scholars.

Susan Docherty

Newman University College, Birmingham

The Old Testament: A New, Cutting-Edge Translation of the Septuagint, vol. 1. The Pentateuch.

Nicholas King. Buxhall, Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Publishers, 2010. Hbk. Pp. ix + 362. £19.99. ISBN 978-1-84867-285-7.

Following his successful translations of the New Testament (2004) and the Wisdom Books of the Septuagint (2008), Nicholas King now offers us his English version of the five books of Moses according to the Greek Old Testament or Septuagint (henceforth: LXX). King is a Jesuit priest who teaches New Testament at Campion Hall, Oxford University. Each of these five Pentateuchal books, as presented here, begins with a page or two of introduction by King. Most pages of the translation have about half a dozen brief footnotes (set in very small print), often comparing the Greek with the Hebrew in translation. The volume concludes with three maps.

In his preface, King gives three reasons for translating the Old Testament from the Greek rather than the original Hebrew. First, most of the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament from the Septuagint—the clearest example being Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14 using the word *parthenos* ("virgin") where the Hebrew text speaks of a "young woman." Second, the LXX is a witness to one of the three early traditions of the OT, the other two being the Rabbinic Hebrew and the Samaritan. Third, the many diaspora Jews around the time of Jesus used the LXX rather than the Hebrew text of the Bible. King adds that he accepts the

scholarly consensus on the origins of the LXX Pentateuch, translated in Alexandria (Egypt) in the 3rd century BCE.

To provide an idea of this volume, we can sample a few verses. Starting at the first page, we find Gen 1:1-2: “In the beginning God made heaven and earth. And the earth was invisible and unformed; and darkness was upon the abyss, and the Spirit of God was rushing upon the water.” Immediately, by comparison with the *RSV*, we notice several differences. Instead of the special Hebrew verb *bara’* (“created,” used of a divine action), the Greek has the everyday verb *epoiēsen* (“made”). Whereas the Hebrew text says that the earth was originally “without form and void” (*RSV*), the Greek states that it was “invisible and unformed.” In addition, while the Hebrew speaks of God’s Spirit (or wind) “moving” (*RSV*) or hovering or brooding over the water, the Greek depicts it as “rushing upon the water.” King’s footnote on Gen 1:2 explains: “A related word in the Greek text is used at Acts 2:2, on that first Pentecost day. We notice that both these ‘rushings’ describe the coming of the Spirit of God.”

King translates God’s words to the serpent in the Greek: “And I shall put hostility between you and the Woman, and between your seed and her seed; he will watch your head, and you will watch his heel” (Gen 3:15). In a footnote on the word “watch,” King says: “this is how the Greek has translated a word whose meaning is no longer clear to us: ‘bruise’ and ‘snatch’ are traditional translations of the Hebrew here.” Later, in the famous *Shema* passage, *RSV* renders Moses’ Hebrew instructions on what to do with God’s commands, “they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut 6:8), while King renders the Greek: “they will be immovable before your eyes.” His footnote on “immovable” explains: “this is translating a Hebrew word of uncertain meaning, which will later be translated as ‘phylacteries.’”

It may be useful to compare King’s volume with the Pentateuchal books in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, edited by Albert Pieterse and Benjamin G. Wright (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; henceforth *NETS*). Whereas *NETS* transliterates biblical names from the Greek (e.g., Moyses, Mariam, Iesous), King makes use of the familiar forms (e.g., Moses, Miriam, Joshua). While *NETS* sticks to the term “sons of Israel” in Exod 19:1, King has the translation “children of Israel.” In the passage on preparations to make the Tent of Witness in the desert (Exodus 35), King’s clear verse-by-verse layout of the translation enables readers to see immediately that (by comparison with the Hebrew) the Greek has omitted several verses (Exod 35:8, 15, 17-18), whereas *NETS* does not reveal this point.

Unfortunately, I detected one lapse in King's version. Where *NETS* renders the Greek opening of Exod 20:17: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; you shall not covet your neighbor's house," King has: "You are not to desire your neighbour's husband or wife. You are not to desire your neighbour's house." Such gender equality (however laudable in contemporary ethics) is not present in the Greek here, according to the standard edition of Rahlfs. However, this uncharacteristic lapse does not occur in the parallel text in Deut 5:21, which King renders correctly: "You are not to desire your neighbour's wife."

The examples given above illustrate the value of this translation, enabling readers who know no Greek to compare the LXX with the Hebrew wording translated in most Bibles (e.g., *RSV*, *NRSV*, *JB*, *NJB*). The unobtrusive footnotes offer useful sidelights on the biblical text, though they will not replace a full commentary. As a whole, the translation is readable and clear. King is to be commended for offering us an accessible version of the Greek Pentateuch, and we wish him well as he seeks to complete his translation of the whole Septuagint.

Jeremy Corley

Ushaw College, Durham

New Testament

New Perspectives on the Nativity.

Jeremy Corley (ed). London: T&T Clark, 2009. Pp. xi + 215.

This book reexamines a well known story in fresh ways. As Corley explains in the introduction, the twelve essays gathered here offer "a wide variety of new perspectives – literary, political, feminist, theological, poetic, Islamic, and liturgical" (p.1).

In the opening chapter, Wansbrough surveys works on the nativity published since the appearance of Raymond Brown's monumental work, *The Birth of the Messiah* (1993). The list is up to date and covers many noteworthy publications, although it excludes commentaries, contains only a few works in French and German, and focuses more on Lucan titles rather than Matthean ones.

The next section of the volume contains four essays on Luke's infancy narrative. Ian Boxall elucidates Luke's literary artistry in crafting his account of the birth of

Christ. Luke's tripartite story of the birth of Jesus, the angelic annunciation to the shepherds, and the confirmatory visit of the shepherds creates a rich symbolic world that foreshadows much of what will happen in the passion account. His infancy narrative shows that Jesus is Lord and Messiah, that his peaceful birth will paradoxically lead to division, and that he will be rejected and crucified yet thereby enter into glory.

Barbara Reid's essay applies a feminist hermeneutic to Luke's infancy narrative, illustrating how the evangelist portrays Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna as courageous figures who stand in Israel's prophetic tradition and who proclaim an alternate vision of a world where more egalitarian and just social structures shall reign. Each woman encounters "opposition, silencing, dismissal, yet each persists in her loyalty to God" by speaking his word and acting on it (p.46). In so doing, they prefigure the prophetic ministry of Jesus and also give inspiration for women in the church today.

Leonard Maluf challenges us to rethink the traditional interpretation of Zechariah's Benedictus as a messianic hymn and view it instead as a prophetic proclamation deeply rooted in OT images. Focusing primarily on Luke 1:69, Maluf exhorts interpreters to read the verse "in salvation-historical perspective" (p.59). He contends that the "horn of salvation" is not meant to be construed christologically but rather as a reference to David and his dynasty.

Moving in the opposite direction, Nicholas King invites us not to rethink a traditional interpretation but to recover it. Some revisionist scholars claim that *katalyma* in Luke 2:7 refers not to an inn, as normally thought, but to the guest room of a house. Hence the Holy Family was not "left outside in the cold but given both privacy and warmth in the animals' quarters" (p.67). This interpretation is incorrect since it overlooks a recurring theme in Luke-Acts: "God's Messiah, and his eventual followers, encounter many obstacles and difficulties" yet "because the Holy Spirit is driving the narrative, everything in the end will be well" (p.68).

Following these four chapters on Luke's infancy narrative are four on the Matthean nativity story. Warren Carter underscores the importance of Roman imperial power in Matthew's narrative. Matthew subtly links Rome with Israel's earlier oppressors, Assyria (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23) and Babylon (Matt 1:11-12, 17), through a series of allusions, illustrating that Rome is likewise a means of punishing the people's wickedness yet at the same time destined to fall. Opposing Roman power (which includes King Herod) is God, and the birth of Jesus ("the Lord saves") is a

manifestation of God's salvific presence in this imperial world. God, not Rome, will prevail.

Benedict Viviano turns to the very beginning of Matthew's gospel and unpacks the theology of history embedded in the genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17). Matthew patterns the family tree on a seven-period division of history that was prevalent in contemporary thought (e.g. 1-2 Enoch; Epistle of Barnabas). Matthew omits the first two epochs of the seven-stage schema, Adam to Noah and Noah to Abraham, and instead stresses Jesus' descent from David and Abraham, linking him with the Jews of the OT and all nations descended from Abraham. Lastly, the genealogy looks forward to the final two epochs that are yet to come.

Bernard Robinson considers the entire Matthean infancy narrative, declining to advance a single argument and instead dealing with various aspects. These include the story's (unintentionally) androcentricity, its uniqueness in comparison to Luke's version, and its genre of "creative historiography" (p.114). Robinson then briefly analyzes each episode in Matthew 1-2 as well as the evangelist's "formula citations" of the OT. He ends by showing how the nativity anticipates what will happen later in the gospel.

Christopher Fuller employs a unique approach to the story of the magi, borrowing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to illustrate how Pasolini's 1964 film *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* offers a "carnavalesque reading" (p.132). Pasolini's close-ups of many smiling faces "call to mind Bakhtin's emphasis on the bodily nature of the carnivalesque" and "underscore the laughing subtext of carnival" (p.145).

The last three chapters represent a potpourri of interests. Ann Loades looks at recent British poetry that touches on the nativity. Her essay meanders at times as she traverses through various topics, such as Isaiah the poet, parenthood, and the experience of Mary, giving substantial excerpts from relevant poems.

John Kaltner turns our attention to another Abrahamic tradition, considering the prominent place of Mary in the Quran, the hadith, and non-canonical Muslim texts. Mary continues to rank highly in Muslim piety and theology, and scholars debate whether Mary was the greatest of all women and whether she was a prophetess. She enjoys a very lofty status among Muslims, as with Catholics, and although they do not share the exact same Mariology, the two traditions share much in common concerning her.

The final essay by Thomas O’Loughlin attempts to recover the mystery of the nativity story often lost in an historical approach. Our liturgical remembering celebrates “a historical reality that is constitutive of our ‘now’ as the church” (p.183), but we must not confuse liturgical recollection with historical reconstruction. Instead of reading these stories diachronically as we would a codex, it would behoove us to contemplate them synchronically as if gazing upon an icon.

The volume represents a fine piece of New Testament scholarship while at the same time appealing to a more popular audience, intended for “preachers and teachers” and “any reader wanting to go deeper into the Christmas message” (p.1). It is debatable how much lay readers will be interested in some of the essays, especially ones so narrowly focused on a single verse (Maluf, Viviano) or word (King) or based on a thoroughly post-modern analysis (Fuller). These and other minor shortcomings notwithstanding, the book is a welcome addition to the field. Its variegated methodology is a breath of fresh air as the contributors refocus our attention on the nativity story with novel approaches, yielding new insights into a familiar tale.

Geoffrey Miller

St. Louis University