

for much less. This volume serves as a very useful commentary on his thought and an illuminative guide for the challenges and questions that lay ahead.

Jesus & the Eyewitnesses

Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

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Reviewed by Sara Parks-Ricker, McGill University.

In *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham makes the controversial claim that the gospels were not the product of evolving community traditions, but were compiled primarily from and/or by eyewitnesses. The dust-jacket promises that this “momentous” volume will destroy the long-time division between the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of faith” in looking to “the use of personal names in first-century Jewish Palestine”, “recent developments in the understanding of oral tradition”, and “the rich resources of modern study of memory, especially in cognitive psychology.”

With scepticism and curiosity, I turned to the introductory chapter, where I hoped the author would situate himself among the “quests” and convince me that another book about Jesus was necessary. Bauckham did not disappoint. His initial chapter critiques the “whole enterprise of attempting to reconstruct the historical figure of Jesus” insofar as it depends on “subjecting the Gospels to ruthlessly objective (so it is claimed) scrutiny” (3). Bauckham complains about the diversity of historical reconstructions of Jesus (3) and about what he thinks is a disproportionately sceptical approach to gospel material (4). He presents the old question of whether “the Jesus historians reconstruct” is the Jesus “at the center of the Christian religion” (2) as an ongoing dilemma, and proposes to bring these two Jesuses together by introducing the category of “eyewitness testimony.”

Bauckham has not, of course, discovered this ancient category. He uses S. Byrskog’s *Story as History – History as Story* (WUNT 123, 2002), which examines the use of “eyewitness informants” as “best practice” for Greco-Roman historians (9). Building on Byrskog, Bauckham argues that the gospels are primarily in keeping with “the methods and aims of ancient historiography” (11), rather than the needs and desires of communities (34ff).

Bauckham begins this in ch. 2 by revisiting Papias as a source. In distinguishing between the time *when* Papias writes (early 2nd century) and the time *about which* Papias writes (his alleged 1st century gathering of oral reports about Jesus), Bauckham re-evaluates extant Papias fragments as more valuable than usually allowed (cf. chs. 9, “Papias on Mark and Mathew,” and 16, “Papias on John”). It might be noted that

this generous treatment of Papias is arrived at by treating Eusebius (13) with just the sort of critical scepticism Bauckham dislikes seeing applied to the gospel texts. In the end, while the re-evaluation of Papias is of methodological interest, and while Bauckham does convince that eyewitness testimony was “best practice” at the time of the gospels and that the concept of “oral tradition” requires major reworking for use within relatively short periods, such as the time between the life of Jesus and the compilation of the gospels (see ch. 10), this by no means *necessarily* indicates that the gospel writers used (or were) eyewitnesses and that the gospels did not instead (or also) grow up according to the needs of the early church.

Bauckham’s work on names in the gospel traditions (ch. 3) shines, as usual. Whether or not one reaches his conclusions, one must appreciate the tedious and systematic data-gathering and organizing that has gone into his interrogation of patterns of use (and non-use) of proper names in the gospels. His tables of usage (e.g. ch. 3, ch. 6) and his statistical reworking of Tal Ilan’s 2002 lexicon of ancient Palestinian Jewish names (ch. 4) are invaluable. Refreshingly, he does not *entirely* ignore extracanonical literature, an omission which results in so many useless publications. He finds that the practice of naming one’s closest sources might explain the seemingly odd or random choices of early Christian authors to include or omit proper names. Some of his arguments are less convincing than others, e.g.:

If the names are of persons well known in the Christian communities, then it also becomes *likely* that many of these people were themselves the eyewitnesses who first told and *doubtless* continued to tell the stories in which they appear and to which their names are attached. A good example is Cleopas (Luke 24:18): the story does not require that he be named and his companion remains anonymous. There seems *no plausible reason for naming him other than to indicate that he was the source of the tradition*. He is *very probably* the same person as Clopas, whose wife Mary appears among the women at the cross in John 19:25. Clopas is a very rare Semitic form of the Greek name Cleopas, so rare *that we can be certain* this is the Clopas who, according to Hegesippus, was the brother of Jesus’ father Joseph. . . (47; italics mine)

The final chapter, “The Jesus of Testimony,” answers a historian’s potential concerns with eyewitness testimony, both ancient and modern. Building upon Bloch (“The Historian’s Craft”) and especially Ricoeur (*Memory, Time, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony”*), Bauckham argues that testimony is both “theologically appropriate” and “historically necessary.”

In the end, the thesis is that “the Gospels put us in close touch with the eyewitnesses of the history of Jesus” (472). Yet while Bauckham keeps insisting that eyewitness testimony is a way to break down the barrier between the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of faith,” this is not quite what happens. Rather, the work

is an(other) attempt at a “Christ of history,” i.e. an(other) attempt to authenticate the Christ of the author’s faith. Like other “Christs of history,” Bauckham’s is generally of interest only to Christian insiders who already pit the gospels *against* historical criticism to a certain extent; those who differentiate sharply between the Historical Jesus and the Christ will find little here to convince them otherwise. Had the book not been framed and marketed as a victory between these “sides,” its valuable work (e.g. on Papias, testimony in Greco-Roman historiography and the gospels, and Palestinian-Jewish names in general) would surely have reached a wider audience.

In the first paragraph of the book, Bauckham complains about Historical Jesus researchers who “have castigated their predecessors but put their faith in new methods and approaches that they claim will succeed where others failed.” The reader must decide whether the present volume escapes this verdict. While the book advocates important under-used approaches to the gospel material (such as onomastics), the leap from these insights to the historical Jesus is not one other scholars will rush to follow Bauckham in making.

Although *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses* criticizes the bias of “sceptical” approaches, it has its own theological programme. It goes to varying lengths—psychology, hermeneutics, philology, historiography—in order to convince the reader that eyewitness testimony was considered “best practice” at the time of the gospels, and that eyewitness memory can more or less be trusted (see esp. ch. 13). Yet it does not take seriously the possibility that authors might *fabricate* “best practice.” Nevertheless, it cannot be dismissed. It is a blend of careful work which contributes to scholarly knowledge, and of heavy bias which only contributes to the polemical din. This is no surprise; it’s a blend that has always characterized Historical Jesus Research.

A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible

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Wegner is a professor of Old Testament at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix (Arizona), having taught at Moody Bible Institute for some 12 years. *A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible* is his second book, following closely on the heels of his previous and excellent book, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, in which Wegner outlines the origin, transmission and translation of the Bible as a literary work. The present *Guide to Textual Criticism* is