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Book Reviews

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Presided over by two of the most authoritative figures of Hebrew Bible and New Testament scholarship, respectively, this collection of essays comprises a series of eight presentations delivered at a special spring session of the Hayward Lectures at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia in April of 2006. The papers are grouped into thematic couplets: two discuss the Septuagint within the history of the canon; two discuss the extracanonical corpus; two address the question of scriptural authority; and two discuss the emergence of canon ideologies as manifested in the tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Pauline canon. Craig Evans begins the volume with a wonderful introduction to the transmission of the Hebrew Bible, the Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, and New Testament. Students unacquainted with the details of this literature will find it especially enlightening. The volume as a whole provides a sweeping panorama of the predominant perspectives on the development of the biblical canon and is a must read for any student involved in related research.

Emanuel Tov, editor in chief of the Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project, begins the discussion with an investigation into the Septuagint as a key for the literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible. James H. Charlesworth follows with a presentation of the writings which sit “ostensibly” outside the canon, and what they can teach us about formative Judaism. Stephen G. Dempster evaluates evidence intrinsic and extrinsic to the Hebrew Bible for the development of a tripartite perspective on its canon. R. Glenn Wooden next evaluates the role of the Septuagint in the formulation of the Jewish and Christian canons. Craig A. Evans reappears with an investigation into the “possibilities and problems” of searching the New Testament Apocrypha for a glimpse at early Christian perspectives on Jesus. Stanley E. Porter discusses the process of the compilation...
of the Pauline corpus and their canonicity. Lee Martin McDonald, one of the world’s authorities on the question of canon, looks at the major issues in canonical criticism: book lists, variation in ancient manuscripts, and the translation of the scriptures into other languages. The concluding paper, “Canon and Theology: What Is at Stake?” by Jonathan R. Wilson, discusses the nature of theology, its location within the community, and how these two principles reflect on the rather nebulous concept of a canon.

Room does not permit a comprehensive review of all the articles, but some highlights should prove informative. Tov has long been an authority on the relationship of the Septuagint to the Hebrew Bible. In this volume’s paper, he seeks to isolate two types of variants between the MT and the LXX, namely those indicative of a divergent Hebrew Vorlage and those which manifest the independent exegesis of the translator. The latter generally comprise the passages more freely translated from the Hebrew, while the former betray Semitic grammatical and syntactical idiosyncrasies, like the use of the uniquely Semitic phrase wayehi’ ahare hadebarim ha’eleh. It is with this principle that Tov is primarily concerned, and he uses it as a key to the uncovering of the Hebrew parent texts to the Septuagint corpus and the relationship of those texts to the Masoretic texts. This type of research is critical to understanding the evolution of the text of the Hebrew Bible and its relationship to the concept of canonicity, specifically its elasticity. Tov shows that in some cases the LXX represents a more archaic Hebrew Vorlage than that preserved in the MT, and in others represents a tradition subsequent to that of the MT. This shows a divergent text tradition which stands in contrast in many ways to the Masoretic tradition, and, as Tov concludes, represents a community of believers separate from that of the Masoretic texts. This reveals new questions about the antiquity of the concept of canon within formative Judaism.

Charlesworth continues this theme with a discussion of the extracanonical groups of texts from the same time period (Second Temple). He explains that a large corpus of theological and historical literature was produced and consumed during the Second Temple Period that contributed in no small way to the development of the Jewish and early Christian identity, but that was ultimately excluded from the canon. This raises more questions about early Judaism and Christianity’s definition of canon and even scripture, two words which too often assumed to be synonyms. Charlesworth presents a number of insights into Judaism that can be garnered from thorough investigation of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. The overarching theme: although fragmented and heterodox, the Jewish communities shared a number of common concerns, namely, the search to understand God, the preeminence of Torah, the need for faith within a volatile world.

Dempster’s paper, “Torah, Torah, Torah: The Emergence of the Tripartite Canon,” seeks to evaluate the internal and external evidence for the development of a tripartite perspective on the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The internal evidence shows a concern for two primary sources for the revelation of God: the
Torah, and the prophets. Dempster proposes wisdom as a third. From the external evidence Dempster draws a relatively consistent vernacular used to reference the holy writings. They are generally referred to as the Law and the Prophets, although a collection of texts beginning in the Maccabean period seems to reference a third category: the writings. While Dempster is comfortable positing a rather early date (the first century) for the standardization of the tripartite canon, he overlooks the slight discrepancies in the references to this third category. While a general tripartite perspective on scripture can hardly be argued, the third category does not necessarily represent a consistent closed set of books. The numbers of books within this category, and in some cases the books contained in it, differ from text to text, which is at odds with the contemporary denotation of a canon as a closed and concrete standardization of scripture. I am inclined to disagree with Dempster’s early date for the closing of the Jewish canon. I side with McDonald and a second century date.

Lee Martin McDonald provides the penultimate discussion in this volume. He has published numerous texts on the discussion of canon (most recently *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*), and here discusses three of the most critical concerns for the canon history and canonical criticism: book lists, variation in ancient manuscripts, and the translation of the scriptures into other languages. For centuries the book lists of early Judaism and Christianity have been perceived as rather clear indications of an early consciousness of scriptural canonicity. Discrepancies in the number and contents of those lists have been overlooked, as have the variations in number and content of ancient codices and translations. McDonald reviews their import as they relate to discovering the earliest intimations of scriptural canonicity. Aimed primarily at an audience not already familiar with his publications on the topic, this investigation will perhaps serve as the definitive introduction to the problems of canon and canonicity in antiquity.

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*Mark’s Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith’s Controversial Discovery* is the first dissertation written on the Secret Gospel of Mark. Brown’s exegesis seeks to demonstrate that Mark wrote both the shorter gospel, and the “Longer Gospel of Mark” (which he abbreviates as LGM). The book comprises nine chapters convincing covering issues such as forgery and authenticity, modern academic paradigms, the interrelationship of the gospels, the Longer Gospel’s purpose, Markan literary forms, and how the “mystery of the kingdom of God” relates to the Markan Gospels.
In chapter 1, Brown gives the history, methodology, scholarly assessments, and a literary thesis on the LGM. Brown polemizes the common academic mindset of LGM as “non-canonical gospel = imitation gospel = mid second century gospel = heretical gospel” (p. 9). He also posits his idea that the young man with a linen sheet in Gethsemane (Mark 14:51) is the same as in LGM. Brown argues that the combined stories involving the young man with the linen cloth are evidence of established Markan literary techniques of “juxtaposing episodes and framing sections of a narrative” (p. 19).

Chapters 2–3 address issues dealing with ancient and modern forgeries, LGM’s relationship to John, LGM’s relationship to the synoptic gospels, and oral tradition. Chapters 4–5 address issues such as the nature of the LGM, its original purpose, its later purpose, and initiatory interpretations of LGM. In chapter 5, Brown reasons that the initiation scene in the LGM cannot represent a baptism for Catechumens, but rather an esoteric teaching given only to the most advanced Christians.

In Chapters 6–9 Brown’s general focus is on Markan literary techniques. He specifically speaks of intercalation, inclusio, and verbal echoes. Brown comments that the insertion of (LGM 1:6–7, 9) would form a perfect inclusio with (Mark 16:3, 5, 8). Brown sees the passion narrative being bracketed as evidence of the validity of LGM. Brown demonstrates that the multifarious literary techniques used in Mark correspond exactly with the LGM selections. He concludes by affirming his belief that LGM should be given the same level of credence as canonical gospel writing. Brown postulates that if we had the entire copy of LGM we would possess a much greater understanding of early Christianity.

I disagree with Brown’s conclusions that the young man with a linen sheet in Gethsemane represents imitation and following of Christ’s passion. The young man could simply have been part of an initiation ritual at Gethsemane. However, Brown’s logic that the young man in Gethsemane is used as a literary device seems correct. Brown’s idea that LGM serves as the transitioning bracket to begin the passion narrative in Mark seems to be exactly the type of thing Mark would do in order to emphasize a change in the narrative. His belief that further comparisons of LGM with John could shed new light on gospel authorship seems plausible. I agree that perhaps there could be some connection between the authorship of LGM and John, because the two “Lazarus” stories are positioned chronologically in the same location. Brown seems to have made an accurate conclusion that both Lazarus stories represent the first part of a bracket that begins the passion narrative. Thus, Lazarus becomes the literary example of what will happen to Jesus by the end of the passion narrative.

*Mark’s Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith’s Controversial Discovery* is an interesting and insightful read. Brown’s lack of bias and detailed research adds compelling support for the authenticity of the LGM.

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