4. Gospels

_The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings_
Thomas L. Brodie
NTM 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004, 1-905048-03-3, £65.00, $135.00, €120.00, xxvi + 653 hb

Some forty years of study and reflection lie behind a fresh account of the Gospels, Acts and Paul’s letters. It gives careful attention to ancient Graeco-Roman authors’ discussions of and practice in, imitation, and also to the practice of producing re-written Bible, all in conversation with a wide range of scholarship. Using Deuteronomy as a model, Papias’s Matthew writes a collection of _logia_ of Jesus, which are then reflected in 1 Corinthians. These together form a basis for a proto-Luke whose structure is modelled on the Elijah-Elisha sequence, and which runs from the birth narratives through to the Council of Jerusalem. This is next used by Mark, along with other matter, and Mark is in turn re-worked with an eye on Romans and with some expansion of the _logia_ to produce our Matthew. This Matthew and Mark and Proto-Luke are used (though to a lesser extent) by John. Finally our Luke–Acts is written, using Proto-Luke, Mark, Matthew and John. There is no place for oral tradition, all is literary (albeit composed for oral performance). No historical Jesus (or Paul) is recoverable, only ideal literary figures.

Despite attention to mimetic practice, there is no account of ancient use of sources with its preference for agreement (actually elided from Arrian, as quoted, p.13); nor even attention to Josephus’s practice in his re-written Bible. Brodie’s final Luke must take the odd and unprecedented trouble to omit most of the noteworthy precise agreements of his Mark and Matthew. The thesis does not begin to persuade.

_F. Gerald Downing_

_Heil und Erlösung: Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Gnosis_
Takashi Onuki
WUNT 165; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 3-16-147970-X, €99.00, viii + 494 hb

Takashi Onuki is one of Japan’s leading New Testament scholars, editor of the translation of the Nag Hammadi codices into Japanese and a frequent contributor to New Testament studies more internationally. This volume collects together 14 essays (a number translated from Japanese for the first time), divided into studies on the Gospels and Jesus, on the New Testament and Gnosis, and on the application of the study of ancient Gnosis and apocalyptic eschatology to today. In Part I, after the ‘Rabies in Q’
essay (originally in *NTS*, 2000) and a long piece on the healing miracles (pp. 20-59), there are two interesting studies on soteriology and temporality. For Onuki, past, present and future are alike ‘condensed’ or ‘centred’ in Jesus, a fact that helps to explain how God in Mk 12 is the God of the living (i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and not of the dead. Not all will be persuaded of the thesis that the patriarchs are resurrected and have already entered the Kingdom, but the wider argument merits serious consideration. Onuki’s contributions on Gnosis show his facility not only with the Nag Hammadi material, but also with late antiquity more widely. While the one chapter in English (all the rest are in German) could certainly have benefited from more attention to proof-reading by the publishers, it is good to have more of Onuki’s work available in German.

Simon Gathercole

*Jesus and Gospel*
Graham N. Stanton
Cambridge: CUP, 2004, 0-521-00802-6/0-521-810329, £15.95/£40.00, xii + 239 pb/hb

Half of this book of essays by Stanton is essentially new material. The other half consists of lightly revised pieces that have appeared elsewhere. The previously published chapters are on the emergence of the fourfold Gospel, the place of Jesus traditions in Justin and Irenaeus, the idea of ‘the law of Christ’ from Paul to Justin, and early objections to Jesus and to the resurrection.

One new essay suggests the emergence of the codex from a Christian tradition of note taking. There is interesting use of evidence from Vindolanda and elsewhere. Another essay re-evaluates the quality of very early Christian papyri. The main new piece, however, is on the ‘gospel’ word group. Stanton suggests a process of development first from Jesus’ use of the related verb, to extremely early Christian use of the noun in the very unusual singular form, then to Matthew as the first to use it of written narratives of Jesus. Stanton’s view on the very early usage of the noun is that it soon represented a contrast to Roman imperial ‘good news’. The unusual Christian usage was also an element of a sociolect, a speech-form marking someone as an ‘insider’. Stanton powerfully draws together a range of strands of argument on the imperial theme. It would have been good if he had been able to give more space to analysing the individual New Testament occurrences of the word group. Such work might help to put a bit more flesh onto the bones of the process that Stanton sees at work in the development of the term. This book is a good collection of articles and will no doubt form an important element of scholarly discussion on its topics.

Peter Oakes

*Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels*
Clinton Wahlen
WUNT 2.185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 3-16-148387-1, €54.00, xi + 272 pb

Scholarly exegesis of the Synoptic references to ‘impure spirits’ has been remarkably uninterested in what exactly made these spirits (or their victims) impure. Commentators and translators have often been content simply to highlight that the key phrase is, in referential terms, interchangeable with ‘demons’ and ‘evil spirits’, an observation
whose general reliability is far less significant than its silence about the terminology’s non-referential aspects. The silence has now been filled by Clinton Wahlen, whose work analyses the interface between the Synoptic traditions regarding exorcism and contextually relevant systems of purity. Wahlen probes into the way in which the impurity of the Synoptic demons might be best understood (e.g. ritual, moral or other?) and argues in general that each Synoptist puts his own distinctive slant on the terminology. Furthermore, the phrase almost certainly goes back to the historical Jesus, whose context and exorcisms cry out for fresh examination in the light of Wahlen’s work (which focuses more on the context of each evangelist’s redaction than on the earliest stages of the tradition’s development). Noteworthy strengths of the study include (1) its argument that the impure spirits of the Synoptics are conceptualized in a manner that allows them to be located on a developmental trajectory between the preoccupation with community identity in Qumranian demonology and the comparatively stronger interest of later Jewish and early Christian literature in the ethical praxis of the individual (pp. 171-72); (2) its sensitive handling of rabbinic materials attesting the conviction that impure spirits were especially inclined to attack persons who clung willingly to impurity (pp. 58-59); and (3) its very fine discussion of the link effected by the purity motif between Mk 7.1-23 and the exorcism story in 7.24-30 (pp. 99-101).

Wahlen’s work takes several big steps towards the filling of a gap in our understanding of demonic beings, exorcism and healing in the Synoptics; and in view of the considerable weight these topics collectively possess in the primary sources, his study deserves to be read by every serious student of the Gospels. Still, Wahlen’s argument is weakened by several shortcomings, most of which stem from his methods and his assumptions about language. In general, although Wahlen acknowledges that analysis of an ancient author’s vocabulary and terminological preferences can take us only so far towards an understanding of the author’s perspective on a given topic (p. 119), at several points his work focuses none the less on strictly lexical considerations to the neglect of larger narrative dynamics. For example, in elaborating a variation on the familiar stance that sees Mark consistently distinguishing exorcism from the healing of disease (p. 88), and which tightly associates the use of ἐκβάλλειν with the former and θεραπεύειν with the latter, Wahlen requires the reference to ‘casting out demons’ in the summary of Jesus’ activities in Mk 1.39 to exclude the healing of illness (pp. 84, 94), a distinction that not only does violence to the pregnant juxtaposition of the same summary and the ensuing unit about Jesus’ cleansing of the leper (1.40-45) but also ignores the evidence from Qumran suggesting that ‘leprosy’ was probably understood in Jesus’ Palestinian milieu to be caused by the invasion of an ‘impure spirit’ (see, e.g., 4QDamascus Document 6 i 6-13). The presence of broadly similar difficulties in Wahlen’s handling of Mt. 10.1, 8 (pp. 135-36) and Lk. 10.9, 17-18 (pp. 156-59), moreover, contributes to the formation of an interpretative pattern whereby the prominence of demons and impure spirits in causing the illnesses mentioned in the Synoptics is, ironically and in general, underestimated.

Consequently, after perceptively pointing out his topic’s neglect by scholars and then tempting us to see impure spirits and purity issues where we might not have seen them previously, Wahlen ultimately leads us towards a reading of the Synoptics that is
not as unfamiliar as it probably should have been. Had his methodological preference for redaction criticism been chastened a bit more thoughtfully by methods such as socio-rhetorical criticism, narratology, pragmatics and discourse analysis, all of which have much to tell us about the workings of narrative in general (and not just ‘fictional works’, p. 21), his readings of the Synoptic narratives probably would have surprised and corrected us in ways that his otherwise outstanding study of those materials does not.

Todd Klutz

Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews: A Lectionary Commentary
Ronald J. Allen & Clark M. Williamson
Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004, 0-664-22763-5, $24.95, xii + 261 hb

Aimed at Protestant preachers, this collection of one-page commentaries on Gospel readings in the Revised Common Lectionary seeks to move concern with Jewish–Christian relations directly into the sermon-preparation process. An introduction, which highlights the key developments in New Testament scholarship and interfaith relations generally since Vatican II, is followed by the readings for Years A, B and C. Throughout, the reader is alerted to potentially anti-Jewish ways of reading the texts and of misinterpreting the Christian faith; to Jewish and biblical themes, resonances, and echoes; to the social context of Roman occupation; and to the inter-relations between Jesus and the various first-century Jewish groups.

As a study resource, the book is weakened by the absence of either an index or a list of cited sources (i.e. New Testament, Hebrew Bible, Apocryphal, Mishnaic, and Talmudic texts), although a short bibliography and a list of ancient Jewish works in English translation is provided. The introduction, while readable, is light in terms of detail. It does not, for example, attempt to define the ideologies of the Markan, Lukan, Matthean and Johannine communities (although the authors reject the label ‘Christian’), nor does it do much more than assert the Jewishness of the worlds of Jesus and the Gospel writers. This is left to the commentaries, which, of course, are dependent on the lectionary selections; consequently, there is no treatment of such problematic texts as Jn 8, where Jesus associates the Jews with ‘your father the devil’. Such a work, nevertheless, should be welcomed as a practical corrective to what Jules Isaac described as the Church’s traditional ‘teaching of contempt’.

Daniel Langton

Reading the Gospels Today
Stanley E. Porter, ed.
McMNTS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 0-8028-0517-5, £17.99, xvii + 211 pb

The essays in this volume derive from a 2002 Colloquium in New Testament at McMaster Divinity College and form the sixth in the series of McMaster New Testament Studies. They are a combination of overviews of particular aspects of Gospel studies (Synoptic problem; historical Jesus; Gospels and canon) and specific ‘readings’ of each of the canonical Gospels or an aspect of them. The intention (as the title demonstrates) is to make connections between scholarly Gospel interpretation and the contemporary context.
Craig A. Evans argues that attention to the intricacies of the Synoptic problem still matters. Source and redaction criticism still pay exegetical dividends for the busy pastor seeking to work with and explicate the Gospel texts. Stanley Porter explores the relationship between the Jesus of the Gospels and the historical Jesus. Michael Knowles identifies features of orality in Matthew, suggesting that understanding thus comes more through hearing than reading the text. Yong-Eui Lang sets out to read the Markan fig-tree pericopae from a Korean perspective. Allan Martens surveys Luke’s understanding of salvation and sees it as the overall theme of the Gospel. Andrew Lincoln discusses the Johannine notion of truth and its potential appropriation within a modern and postmodern context. Finally two essays explore the use of the Gospels in the early church (Lee Martin McDonald) and in their canonical context (Al Walters in dialogue with Brevard Childs).

While each essay offers the reader something by way of overview and insight into important issues, in the end the volume as a whole disappoints. It lacks any overall coherence beyond its focus on the Gospels, and the promised connections to how the Gospels should be read in the contemporary context are either lacking or, when they are made, appear to be cursory conclusions to essays that largely seek to explain the Gospel texts in their own setting.

Sean Winter

Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem in Historical Jesus Research: The Search for Valid Criteria
Hyeon Woo Shin
CBET 36; Leuven: Peeters, 2004, 90-429-1470-X, €35.00, xvii + 411 pb

In this ambitious book, a revision of his PhD thesis (accepted by the Free University in Amsterdam in 2003), Shin investigates and revises the criteria used to determine originality in New Testament textual criticism (Chapter 1), documentary priority in Synoptic studies (Chapter 2) and authenticity in historical Jesus research (Chapter 3). Shin does not simply survey the criteria that have been used, but engages critically with the generally proposed criteria in his ‘search for valid criteria’. He has a particular interest in the ‘inter-adaptation of the criteria’, that is, the appropriation of lessons from the other two disciplines for the parallel quest for originality in the given discipline.

Three further chapters apply the revised and integrated criteria to a specific passage (Mt. 12.1-8/Mk 2.23-28/Lk. 6.1-5; no reasons are given for selecting this particular passage) in the quest for the original texts (Chapter 4), the quest for priority (Chapter 5) and the quest for the historical Jesus (Chapter 6). Shin’s reconstruction differs from the NA 27 text on eight occasions, seven of these involve supporting the Byzantine text reading over minority Alexandrian support. His arguments are not impossible, but are difficult to evaluate because, astonishingly, the criteria that are decisive are never made explicit. His discussion of literary priority opts decisively for Markan priority, and the following chapter finds Mark’s account basically historically reliable (more so, unsurprisingly, than Matthew and Luke).

In his concluding chapter Shin bravely generates a unified criteria theory, a ‘mother set’ of criteria which enables ‘methodological unification’ of text, source and historical criticism under four basic principles: the principles of Antiquity, Explainability,
Coherence and Plausibility. At a certain level of abstraction these basic principles are unarguable. But as Dr Shin’s discussions themselves show, the parallels between the three types of quest are not always so obvious once the detailed work begins. Nevertheless, we salute his brave and stimulating attempt to bring some measure of integration to the historical study of the New Testament.

Peter M. Head

Verkündigtes Heil: Studien zu den synoptischen Evangelien
Heinrich Baarlink
WUNT 168; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004, 3-16-148393-6, €79.00, viii + 299 hb

The present collection encompasses essays previously published between 1978 and 2002, with a new introduction. Some of the pieces, originally written in Dutch and Indonesian, are translated into German here for the first time, and the focus in the volume is on Mark and Luke (there is very little material on Matthew). The most substantial essay is on implicit and explicit Christology in Mark (pp. 48-97), and there is another on the anti-Judaism problem in the Gospel (pp. 114-41). Of the eight essays on Luke, a number focus on the theological structures underlying the Doppelwerk, especially the salvation-historical periodization (e.g. ‘Ein gnädiges Jahr des Herrn—und Tage der Vergeltung’ on pp. 142-60). A second dominant interest in the volume is the doctrine of the atonement. In both the essay on Mk 10.45 (pp. 98-113) and that on Lk. 22.27 (pp. 209-29) Baarlink is clearly troubled by developments in exegesis and theology in the Netherlands (C.J. den Heyer is a particular target) and counters an over-emphasis on exemplary and transformative interpretations of the death of Christ.

It is certainly useful to have all these studies in one volume. While a number of them seem dated in terms of the scholarship with which they interact, and two—being reprinted lectures—are not footnoted at all, the issues that Baarlink tackles are of perennial interest to New Testament scholars.

Simon Gathercole

The Way it Was: The Narrative of the Birth of Jesus
Matthew Byrne
Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba, 2004, 1-85607-463-3, £7.99, 178 pb

Matthew Byrne’s book on the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke offers a popular-level exploration of the Gospel story, scene by scene. It combines a fair amount of background material relating to first-century Palestine with what is best described as historical imagination, at times bordering on the novelistic. In terms of opening up the narratives for the lay reader, Byrne’s imaginative capacity is effective. Vivid indeed is his account of Zechariah entering the Holy Place to offer incense, and his description of Herod’s Jericho and Jerusalem. In terms of background knowledge, he explores Jewish betrothal and marriage customs, and the legal options open to a Jewish man like Joseph, to illuminate both Matthew and Luke’s annunciation stories. He also devotes considerable space to the family relationships and political intrigues of Herod the Great, and the events leading up to his death.

This is not a book aimed at the scholarly community, but a devotional guide to the stories of the conception and birth. As such, it shows how effective exercise of the hist-
torical imagination can be in bridging the gulf between contemporary readers and the world of first-century Palestine. What is lacking is any sense of the critical issues that the infancy narratives raise. Matthew and Luke are presented as fairly straightforward descriptions of what happened (hence the title), harmonized into a neat chronological sequence without any discussion of genre or purpose. There are also a surprising number of typographical errors.

Ian Boxall

*What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* [rev. edn]
Richard A. Burridge
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Dearborn, MI: Dove, 2004, 0-8028-0971-5, £19.99, xiv + 366 pb

The value of Burridge’s 1992 work is widely acknowledged. After a review of the history of twentieth-century discussions of the genre of the Gospels, he distinguishes in a range of Lives, *vitae, bioi*, from around the first century CE, a set of features that all four Gospels are shown to share. The persuasive conclusion is that hearers would most likely have responded to them in the light of these similarities. Two issues are of particular importance: the insistence that genres are nonetheless not prescriptive (rather do examples share a family resemblance); and the distinction between genre and mode (so a story may be in tragic mode, but not a tragedy). This second edition adds a response to critics that, among other things, clarifies further the latter point: ancient historiography may be ‘biographic’ at times, but *bios* remains a distinguishable genre. There is also reprinted an essay discussing the lack of Lives of rabbis, and its christological significance.

Some questions perhaps remain. If words are ‘performative’, a distinction between accounts largely of utterings and those mostly of other kinds of actions may seem less obvious than Burridge continues to assume. And if a contrast with the absence of rabbinic Lives makes the move to Lives of Jesus the teacher constitute a distinctive advance into Christology, then what should we make of Philo’s *Life of Moses*, or of Josephus’s ‘biographic’ history of the same figure?

F. Gerald Downing

*Many Things in Parables*, Hedrick John

*Spuren von Deuteromarkus II*, Albert Fuchs Mark