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**Early Christian Commentators of the New Testament.** Essays on Their Aims, Methods and Strategies, hg. v. Tobias NICKLAS / Joseph VERHEYDEN. – Leuven: Peeters 2021. (XIV) 305 S. (Biblical Tools and Studies, 42), geb. € 138,00 ISBN: 978-90-429-4573-9

This vol. derives from an international colloquium held at KU Leuven in December 2018, which is one of an ongoing series of colloquia organized by the international research project *Novum Testamentum Patristicum*. The vol. itself is devoted to the reception of the New Testament in early Christianity, within one genre of reception – namely the commentary – with the essays being very wide-ranging.

While most of the essays treat the Latin commentary tradition, the vol. opens with three essays from the Greek tradition. The first of these is *Carl Johan Berglund's* essay, which presents a sympathetic reading of the exegetical method of what is often considered the earliest Christian biblical commentary, the “Valentinian” writer Heracleon’s *Commentary on John*. Despite Origen’s criticisms of Heracleon (which most scholars have followed), B. argues that Heracleon’s commentary did not redirect the Gospel to “express ‘Valentinian’ dogmatic points, but focused on understanding the text at hand” (16). Next is an essay by *Lorenzo Perrone*, which is a sort of summary of Origen’s New Testament exegesis, based primarily on the newly discovered *Homilies on the Psalms*. Although sermons on the Old Testament might not be an obvious starting point for a discussion of New Testament exegesis, as P. notes, one of Origen’s overriding concerns was with the unity of the Testaments. The Psalms are no different, with the Passion of Christ being centre-stage. The third essay on the Greek tradition is that of *Cornelis Hoogerwerf*. Although Theodore’s commentaries on Paul contain few references to the Old Testament – and therefore appear little concerned with links between the Covenants – this essay classifies the references to the Old Testament that are present into three categories: (1.) comparison between the Testaments, (2.) confirmatory testimonies from the Old Testament for Paul’s arguments, and (3.) elucidations of vocabulary, literary figures, and difficult concepts.

The longer section of the book, on the Latin tradition, begins with *Konrad Huber's* essay on Victorinus of Pettau’s exegetical methods in the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*—no easy task, given the lack of technical discussion and methodological terminology throughout the commentary. H. focuses on the idea of recapitulation, or really *repetition*, which is key to Victorinus’ exposition of the Apocalypse—and which idea presages both later ancient and modern readings of this enigmatic biblical book. Following this is *Lukas J. Dorfbauer's* essay on another lesser-known biblical commentator, Fortunatianus of Aquileia. Like some other essays in this vol., this presents an overview of Fortunatianus’ exegesis – which, in light of the very recent discovery of his *Commentary on the Gospels*, is very welcome. In the spirit of “signal[ing] promising fields of further research” (103), D.

draws attention to Fortunatianus' unique, if somewhat inconsistent, manner of interpreting the Gospels.

The four essays that follow are devoted to much better-known theologians and exegetes of the Latin tradition, all of whom wrote within several decades of each other and who all had close ties to the city of Rome. The first is *Josef Lössl's* essay on Marius Victorinus' biblical interpretation in his theological treatises. While this essay has little to say about the interpretation of the New Testament, it does draw attention to the commentarial nature of Victorinus' anti-Arian works on the *homoousion* – namely that these treatises resemble the genre of the “book dialogue” (140), itself a commentarial genre. Next comes *Stephen Cooper's* extended piece on Ambrosiaster's exegetical methods and aims in his commentaries on Paul, focusing on Colossians. Although in Ambrosiaster's commentaries on the other Pauline books, his pastoral concerns often tend in an anti-Jewish direction, in the commentary on Colossians Ambrosiaster identifies paganism as the heresy among Paul's Colossian church, and Ambrosiaster thus uses this as an opportunity to root out paganism among his own flock in late fourth century Rome. Next comes *Alfons Fürst's* essay on the “scientific” exegesis of Jerome found in the prologues of his New Testament commentaries – particularly those on the letters of Paul. Most stimulating are F.'s observations concerning the differences between Origen's Pauline commentaries and those of Jerome. While Jerome largely copies Origen, Jerome's awareness of and reliance on his predecessors (e. g., Apollinaris and Didymus) is much greater than in the commentaries of Origen—who had virtually no predecessors in the interpretation of the New Testament. Next, *Valentina Marchetto* offers a diachronic reading of Augustine's interpretations of John 17,21 and related passages, which concern the oneness of Jesus and the Father and the related oneness of Christ and humanity. M. argues that Augustine consistently interprets this verse according to the *homoousion*, sometimes polemically against the Arians, but always in keeping with his grammatical training and teaching (with “grammar as the ultimate authority”; 242).

Finally, *Sarah Foot's* essay is several centuries removed from those mentioned so far. This essay is also something of a summary of Bede's New Testament exegesis – which is certainly helpful for those of us whose expertise does not quite extend to the eighth century. Especially striking is Bede's almost entire reliance on the previous Latin exegetical tradition, particularly Gregory the Great. While F. offers other fruitful comments on Bede's exegetical methods, his exegesis is summed up in Bede's own felicitous phrase, which Foot refers to through the essay, “following in the footsteps of the fathers.”

Apart from the essays' loose associations with ancient commentaries on the New Testament (which, as the editors recognize, is a vast corpus), there is not significant continuity among the contributions. That is, there is no common set of historical or methodological questions. Nevertheless, in the spirit of stimulating further research on New Testament commentaries from ancient Christianity (one of the stated goals of the vol.: xiii), I offer a few thoughts on some of the larger themes and questions that arise throughout the vol. First, as several contributors indicate, early interpreters of the New Testament were to some extent improvising; in contrast to the early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, in which one could rely on Philo or other Jewish interpreters, there were no precedents for interpreting the New Testament which one could either follow or reject. One of the questions that arises, then, is, can (or should) one allegorize the writings of the New Testament – and, if so, in what ways? What are other *legitimate* ways of commenting upon the texts of the New Testament? Relatedly, it is clear from this vol. that in early Christianity there existed

different types of commentaries for different types of New Testament literature. With the differences among various commentaries being so pronounced, is it even possible to speak about “New Testament commentary” as such, or should we rather speak separately of “Gospel commentaries” and “Pauline commentaries,” etc.? Or perhaps, with Sarah Foot, it would be preferable to refer simply to biblical commentaries. Finally, with so much New Testament scholarship insisting on the radical discontinuity between the first generation of Jesus-related texts and those Christian texts that followed, what can early Christian commentaries tell us about the continuities that exist between the “New Testament” and “Patristics”? As the editors indicate, there is still much to be done on this front, and this vol. represents one starting point for such discussions.

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