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Book Reviews



Culpepper, R. Alan, and Paul N. Anderson, eds. *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*. Society of Biblical Literature Early Christianity and Its Literature 13. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014. 316 pp. ISBN 978-1628370157.

Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles is a volume which—as the subtitle states—aims to “catch up” readers on the current state of scholarship regarding the New Testament epistles of St. John. Alan Culpepper and Paul Anderson have done contemporary students of Johannine literature an invaluable service by editing this admirable book and have succeeded in doing the very thing they set out to do.

Communities in Dispute lives up to its title. Culpepper explains: “The title for this volume conveys an obvious double entendre...It signals both that the essays in this volume deal with the Johannine Epistles as artifacts of ancient communities in dispute...and that they represent the disputes in current scholarship over the interpretation of these short letters.” (3) Bringing together a diverse group of experts in the field, who each contribute a state of the art study of a live issue in the epistles of John, the editors and contributors demonstrate that the Johannine epistles are some of the most difficult and contested books of New Testament. The reader learns that there is little agreement among experts

regarding the authorship, composition, and historical background of the epistles, how the epistles should be approached, and how to interpret the various themes and concepts found within the epistles. Yet the multiplicity of perspectives is the great strength of the book. Since the field *is* so contested, the editors did a fine job of providing the reader with an introduction into the disputed material. Culpepper and Anderson deserve praise for showcasing the many complexities of the field, as well as for allowing both liberal and conservative perspectives to be heard.

The book is also well organized. There are three parts; but due to the nature and size of each part, the book can be divided into two halves. The first half deals with issues related to textual criticism, order of composition, and the historical setting of the epistles. The second half explores the theology and ethics of the epistles. This division is helpful as it enables the reader to mentally organize the different issues that need to be addressed in studying the epistles of John. It also enables the reader to see how one’s view of the origin and context of each epistle influences how the content of the epistles is understood.

The book, however, is quite limited in what it can accomplish. As an introduction to the state of scholarship on the Johannine epistles and of various perspectives on theological subjects found in the literature, it is tremendously useful,

but what it gains in breadth it lacks in depth. The space each contributor has to develop their ideas is only one chapter, and although they make use of that space well, the authors are inevitably limited by the constraints of the book's format. Therefore, while technical and scholarly (it is not for the casual reader), the book is introductory. This is, of course, the expressed goal of the editors—a goal accomplished with flying colors. Readers who are looking for more depth can consult the Works Cited located in the back of the book.

Among the contributors, Urban von Wahlde's exposition of Raymond Brown's Johannine community hypothesis is extremely helpful for understanding the theory. Judith's Lieu's strictly inductive study of the epistles was a refreshing approach that counterbalanced the Brown hypothesis and yielded useful insights. The missional nature of the Johannine epistles was skillfully traced by Peter Rhea Jones and then profoundly contemplated in the superb chapter by David Rensberger. Andreas Köstenberger's chapter on the cosmic trial motif in John's writings was brilliant, showing the deeper theological unity within the entire Johannine corpus (i.e., Gospel of John to Revelation), thus providing a significant argument for common authorship.

The state of scholarship on the Johannine epistles leaves much to be desired. In the opinion of this reviewer the failure of contemporary scholars to incisively probe the crucial question of what precisely John means by his concept of the intra-fraternal love of the brethren is particularly remarkable. In the final chapter, Anderson summarizes the contributions of the book and performs the welcome task of underscoring and recommending areas that Johannine scholars need to focus upon and further develop. However, despite what

appears to be a gaping hole in Johannine scholarship (i.e., the precise meaning of the love of the brethren), Anderson seems unaware that there is a problem. As far as the love of the brethren is concerned, he only proposes that scholars seek to understand how the love of the brethren may be related to the mission of the Church to the world (which is a wonderful proposal to be sure).

Anderson's understanding of the love of the brethren is revealed when—earlier in the book—he makes the following statement: “While some interpreters have distanced the appeal for love within the community from the exhortation of the Synoptic Jesus to love one's enemies, in addition to loving God and neighbor, the difference is directional rather than qualitative. Indeed, it can be more difficult to love those with whom one is close than to love a more distanced adversary.” (91) In other words, for Anderson, the love of the brethren is *not at all* different than the love for our neighbors; it is rather *the prime example of it* (simply due to our brethren's closer proximity)! This statement is representative of a great oversight in Johannine scholarship: the failure to see the exclusive and intra-fraternal nature of the love of the brethren in John (i.e., the love of the brethren is *not* the love of our neighbors, but something quite different). While other contributors in the book do not miss the exclusive nature of the love of the brethren, they too fail to give a satisfying explanation of what precisely this love of the brethren is. In this particular area within the field of Johannine scholarship, the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.

Communities in Dispute delivers on its promise to inform readers about current scholarship on the Johannine epistles. I highly recommend this book for anyone desiring to learn the latest developments

within this exciting field of biblical studies. This is a valuable book and an ideal launching pad for the enthusiastic Johannine scholar.

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Herbel, D. Oliver. *Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of an American Orthodox Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 244 pp. ISBN 9780199324958

D. Oliver Herbel obtained his Ph.D. in historical theology from the Saint Louis University. He currently ministers as a priest in the Diocese of the Midwest at the Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Fargo, North Dakota, and also serves as a military chaplain in the North Dakota Air National Guard. In the eyes of most Americans, the Orthodox Church is either unnoticed or seen as ethnic enclaves for various immigrant groups such as Greeks (popularized in films such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*). However, with increasing interest in this ancient faith, scholars have questioned what is drawing people to a faith so foreign to traditional American Protestantism? Herbel answers this question by arguing that we can understand this phenomenon as being very much at home within American cultural traditions. In his monograph *Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of an American Orthodox Church*, Herbel uses a variety of published and unpublished sources and analyzes the stories of St. Alexis Toth, Fr. Raphael Morgan, Fr. Moses Berry, and Fr. Peter Gillquist and the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC) as case studies to understand the nature of conversion in America.

For Herbel, the answer to understanding conversion is to understand that they are “a turn to tradition, one that occurred through a unique kind of restorationism” (3). Herbel describes this idea this idea as the “anti-traditional

traditional.” American Christianity, in Herbel’s eyes, is characterized by this aversion to traditional religion and the continual fracturing and reforming of Christianity, often in the pursuit of “restoring” the early Christian church. (4) Therefore, American conversion to Orthodoxy is seen as keeping within that tradition of anti-tradition, as converts seek to both to reject their previous traditions and restore the early church by, paradoxically, turning to the tradition of the ancient church. For Herbel, each of his examples utilizes this “anti-traditional tradition” in their own contexts to deal with their own issues.

For St. Alexis Toth, an Eastern Catholic priest from the Subcarpathian region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Herbel sees his conversion to Orthodoxy as serving two ends. First, Toth rejects his previous tradition of Roman Catholicism for its oppressive (and at times racist) treatment of Eastern Rite Catholics, especially his own Carpatho-Russians. Second, Herbel argues that Toth perceived his own personal and his parishioner’s conversion to Orthodoxy not so much as arriving at a new faith, but rather a return to the faith of their ancestors, as the Carpatho-Russians were once Orthodox, but had converted in mass to Roman Catholicism in 1646 (29). Thus, Toth is seen as a form of restorationism, albeit not a typical one. This chapter also introduces two themes Herbel expands on further in the following two chapters: the role race/ethnicity plays in conversion and the turning to tradition as a means to escape oppression.

Herbel’s next two chapters deal with Fr. Raphael Morgn and Fr. Moses Berry’s conversion to Orthodoxy. Fr. Raphael Morgan was most likely born in Jamaica in 1869 (details on Morgan’s life are obscure, a fact that Herbel acknowledges) and in his adult life was an ordained minister in the Protestant Episcopal Church, a historically black denomination. (62-63) During his time there, Morgan not only struggled with the

inner racism of the Episcopal Church, but also began to express doubts theologically about the doctrines of the protestant faith. Morgan began to encounter Orthodoxy through interactions with members of his own circles and a traveling schismatic bishop Joseph Rene Vilatte, who was infamous for his non-traditional ordinations. After a trip to Russia and his encounter with the kindness and racially progressive attitude of the Russian church, Morgan converted and was the first African-American ordination in the history of the Church. He served the rest of his life as a priest, traveling around America and Jamaica. This chapter also contain a section on George Alexander McGuire, another African-American convert, who established the African Orthodox Church (a church which sought to create a church with black leadership). Fr. Moses Berry's own conversion to Orthodoxy followed much the same path of Morgan's. Berry came to adore the liturgy and traditions of the Orthodox Church, while appreciating the presence of black saints such as St. Moses the Black. He converted, was ordained in 1989 (90), and founded the Brother of St. Moses the Black, a movement that sought to promote Orthodoxy among African Americans. For Herbel, both cases offer examples of African-Americans using tradition as means to both escape racial oppression and to restore the Church to its pre-western and pre-racial roots. Moreover, Herbel argues that though race played a large role, it was primarily theological reasons that were the ultimate factor in conversion. One critique of these two chapters is that I would have liked to see the case of McGuire explored in its own chapter rather than a subsection of the chapter on Morgan.

Herbel's final two chapters cover the case of Fr. Peter Gillquist and the Evangelical Orthodox Church. In the decades of the 1970's and 1980's, a group of evangelical ministers, led by Peter Gillquist in the Campus Crusade for Christ, had

become disillusioned with the ministry and began an in-depth study into the history and tradition of the Church. Eventually, they came to the conclusion that they distanced themselves from the historical church and in 1979 (110) established the Evangelical Orthodox Church, ordaining each other as bishops. Their early years were filled with both internal and external controversy, especially their questionable ordinations in the eyes of more established Orthodox churches. They were eventually received into the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1987 (125) among much controversy. The following chapter deals with several specific instances of controversy. For Herbel, the EOC demonstrated the "anti-traditional tradition" and restoration by first rejecting organizations like Campus Crusades and instead sought more authentic understanding of the early church by first searching for, then attempting to recreate their own tradition, and finally seeking to return to a long-established tradition.

Herbel's understanding of the nature of conversion in America is both in-depth and groundbreaking. Herbel's theory of "anti-traditional tradition" is a remarkable description of the American Christian experience and he proves that it is an apt description of the Orthodox convert. Moreover, the fact that Herbel connects his theory with the idea of Christian restorationism makes his understanding of conversion even more remarkable. I have but two critiques of the book. The first has already been mentioned, which is that the fascinating section on George Alexander McGuire should have been its own chapter. The second critique has to do with the apparent lack of study into the conversions of American women. While Herbel does a well enough job of discussing race, the study of gender and its related power structures in relationship to Orthodoxy would only improve this monograph. Despite these missing areas, Herbel's analysis of American conversion to Orthodoxy provides

a solid foundation for future study into the field and would prove useful to anyone interested in the histories of American Orthodoxy, American religion, and the history of conversion.

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Pfatteicher, Philip H. *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 415 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-999712-1.

Drawing on his experience as a minister, liturgist, and literature professor, Pfatteicher has written a hefty yet accessible tome that serves as an excellent guide to the spiritual practice of the church year. His *Journey into the Heart of God* guides the reader through the church year examining various traditional folk practices, communal prayers, collects, hymns, and poems that are incorporated in Catholic and mainline Protestant calendrical-liturgical traditions. The book begins with Advent and ends with an exploration of Ordinary Time, and includes several chapters on the meaning of liturgy. Pfatteicher's book might be best read alongside the Church year it explicates.

Pfatteicher begins his book with a broad bird's-eye view of liturgy. According to the author, liturgy is a pilgrimage through the year, a journey that is both linear as it moves through Jesus's life, and cyclical as it repeats year after year. He writes:

“Liturgical action in its largest sense is the most generally accessible statement of the experience of Christianity. The liturgy is the Church's peculiar literature, its imaginative appropriation of its own past, its present life, and its expectation of the future, which draws upon the whole experience of humankind of the divine and what

the race has found of ultimate significance.” (7–8)

Thus, liturgy is the entrance point into the Christian life. It is a ritual enactment of the sacred drama of salvation history. It is also a *collective* form, stemming from ancient tradition, rather than the invention of any lone thinker (7–10).

Pfatteicher fittingly begins his review of the Church year with Advent, the traditional start of the liturgical year. Advent, he writes, presents the paradox of waiting for an event that historically has already happened; “past-present-future are made one and experience as a single whole” in ritual time (28). In his review of the Sunday Advent readings, collects, and hymns, he demonstrates how this dynamic of waiting increases in intensity. He also explores how the roots of the prayers and songs were traditionally used. For example, he reveals how steeped the ancient authors were in the language of Scripture by charting the biblical quotations in the hymn from the *Aspiciens a longe* responsory in the First Sunday of Advent (36–37). He provides a similar treatment of the “O” antiphons, which occur on the final week of Advent and demonstrates how these ritual chants are also drawn from Holy Writ. Pfatteicher also includes practices of ancient origins that have faded from the contemporary tradition, such as the Ember Days, and various Advent folk practices such as the Advent wreath, candle-lighting, and paper stars. He concludes the chapter by asking what Advent means for Christians in a commercial context which he asserts has “transformed some of the Church's symbols into merchandising encouragements” (70). The next chapters analyze Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

In addition to the liturgical year's cyclical ritualization of salvation history, there is another calendar commemorating saints both ancient and recent explored in ninth chapter of this text. For Pfatteicher,

saints are “those in whom the paschal victory of Christ is clearly manifest, those in whom the holy and life-giving Spirit is clearly at work” (325). The calendar of saints reminds believers that God’s gifts work in a variety of ways. Pfatteicher reminds his readers that the saints are fellow pilgrims both in the Church year and in our journey to sanctification.

Pfatteicher begins his concluding chapter by pointing out that “the liturgical year is a most peculiar construct that can drive logical fundamentalists crazy” (341). Hemispheric differences are one obvious offense, as much of the music accompanying the Church seasons reflect a northern-hemisphere location. (It would be rather odd to sing “In the Bleak Mid-Winter” (78–80) during December in Australia!) Yet rather than reject these oddities as unbecoming our modern era, Pfatteicher encourages his readers to begin a “disciplined search for new insights in the old words and odd ways” (343). The author argues, the deeper we dig into the linear-cyclical, art-filled pilgrimage that is the Church year, the closer mankind comes to the heart of God.

Into the Heart of God explores the rituals that are too often lost in repetition. In the American context, where high-Church liturgy is often seen as irrelevant and dated, Pfatteicher defends ritualized worship. Because much of his book comments on individual days in the Church calendar, it could be helpful to pastors wishing to incorporate liturgical commentary in their homilies. However, it is also written rather densely and packed full of examples—sometimes Pfatteicher gives more examples than he unpacks—making it less useful as an introduction for a newcomer to traditional liturgy. Overall though, his book delights with poetry and devotion.

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