

Garry Wills. *What The Gospels Meant*. New York: Viking, 2008. 224 pages, \$24.95.

Garry Wills is unique in his ability to write about the New Testament in a way that appeals to the desire of popular audiences for the sensational without finding it necessary to depart from ecumenical orthodoxy to do so. Liberal New Testament scholarship offers enough that is still largely unknown on a popular level to be sensational, while serving at the same time the liberal scholarly agenda of making sense of the orthodox tradition for modern critical thinkers. Wills' writing style is lively and engaging. He covers a lot of ground in a short time by offering an overview of the topic worthy of a brief introduction, combined with forays into a selection of texts to give his introduction depth. Teachers will find Wills' books ideal for introducing persons without formal theological training to the basics of liberal scholarly methods and conclusions. Preachers may find here encouragement and a model for exposition of the text that is fascinating, insightful, and permitting of a modern person's struggles with the ancient view of reality. Wills describes the way differences among the four canonical Gospels result from the use of different traditions in order to address the needs of different communities. He focuses on the dominant themes and structures of each Gospel. He selects for particular attention texts that have played a major role in the life of the Church or that have been problematic for modern people. He draws on the work of a few widely respected scholars, notably the late Raymond E. Brown, thus introducing the reader to their more detailed exposition. From time to time he quotes an ancient or modern author or an interpretation of a passage in early Christian art. He tantalizes readers with glimpses of what one discovers by attending to the Greek text, both possibilities for and earlier habits of translation, and variations in early Greek manuscripts. And most importantly he reveals the early Christian community's extensive use of the Hebrew Scriptures to articulate the meaning of Jesus' life for their lives as followers of his way, as well as the broad conformity of the canonical Gospels to the theology of the earlier church as it is articulated in the earlier letters of Paul.

Adam Gilbert Bartholomew, Church of the Ascension, Mount Vernon, NY.