

Mary F. Foskett and Wesley Allen, eds. *Between Experience and Interpretation: Engaging the Writings of the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008. 262 pages. \$28.00

This work is a collection of essays by eleven authors, published to honor Luke Timothy Johnson. Students of New Testament studies know how richly deserving of such an honor Johnson is. He continues to produce important work on interpretation and on specific texts. The names of authors contributing to this volume indicate how widely respected he is. The book begins with an essay by James D.G. Dunn and closes with one by Wayne A. Meeks; and a number of heavy hitters appear between them.

The book is divided into two parts, Part I labeled “Religious Experience and the New Testament” and Part II called “Theological Appropriation of the New Testament.” These two topics identify two primary aspects of Johnson’s academic work. The essays are not only important exegetical and theological works, but they mirror clearly the work of the honoree.

James Dunn, in his opening chapter, shows the importance of Johnson’s insistence that scholars should not focus exclusively on the cognitive aspects of NT texts, but should also pay attention to the experience of early Christians. Dunn does this by focusing attention on the place of the Holy Spirit in NT descriptions of Christian activity. There follows a chapter by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., “Spiritual Sacrifices in Early Christianity.” Harrington contrasts the material sacrifices so common nearly everywhere in the first century with the Christian exclusion of material sacrifices and the use of sacrificial terminology for ethical (Romans 12), ecclesiological (1 Peter 2), and Christological (Hebrews 13) experience and understanding.

Donald Senior, S.J., then turns our attention to the experience of the spoken word in the early church. His chapter, “‘Speaking the Very Words of God’: New Testament Perspectives on the Characteristics of Christian Speech,” looks at the letter of James, as well as Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, and the Pastorals to point up the central role played by the human voice in proclaiming and teaching the gospel. Chapter 4 is an essay titled “‘For the Glory of God’: Theology and Experience in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” by Beverly Roberts Gaventa. As a student of Romans, I was impressed once again with Gaventa’s grasp of both the thought and the application in life of Paul’s work. The combination of experience and interpretation in these chapters reflects well on the work of Johnson.

Part I is brought to a close by two essays: “Ecstasy and *Exousia*: Religious Experience and the Negotiations of Social Power in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” by Sze-kar Wan and “The Beatitudes: Jesus’ Recipe for Happiness?” by Carl R. Holladay. In the former, the author works on Johnson’s suggestions that Paul’s strategy in Galatians is basically to remind the recipients of their experience as Christians in order to strengthen their ability to resist the pressure of the opponents. Holladay, on the other hand, turns to the gospels of Matthew and Luke to study the experience of happiness or blessedness in the teaching of Jesus and the life of the early Christians.

Part II begins with an essay by Richard B. Hays in which he contrasts the work of C.H. Dodd with that of Johnson on “Kerygma and Midrash.” He points out that Dodd was primarily interested in the content of the kerygma while Johnson sees the whole NT as an effort to interpret religious experience. The next chapter, by Gail R. O’Day, is an investigation into her own experience with music, using Johnson’s interpretive model. I found it fascinating to follow her description of “Jesus Made Real in Music.” She focuses on a work by Ozvaldo Golijov written for the 250th anniversary of the death of Johann Sebastian Bach. Its title is *La Pasión Según San Markos*. Very helpful are her insights into the music’s coming from somewhere deep in the

religious life of the composer and so speaking both to the nature of Mark as a passion story and to the hearer as an experience of the real Jesus.

Dennis Hamm, S.J., follows O'Day with "Watch How You Hear," which is a survey of appearances of deaf persons in Luke-Acts and how Luke relates that to the hearing of the word of God. Hamm's concluding implications for pastoral theology make important reading for preachers and others who read scripture in services of worship. Another Jesuit, William S. Kurz, adds a chapter with the title "From the Servant in Isaiah to Jesus and Apostles in Luke-Acts to Christians Today: Spirit-Filled Witness to the Ends of the Earth." Kurz sets Acts 1:8 in relation to the servant motif in Isaiah to show the function of God's servant as witness. He then draws implications for contemporary mission and witness, with special reference to recent Roman Catholic instructions about evangelization.

The volume closes with a chapter by Wayne A. Meeks, called "Swallowing Jonah: Scripture and Identity in Early Christianity." Meeks draws on his extensive knowledge of early Christian art to show how the story of Jonah was applied to different experiences of early Christians. This illustrates how incomplete and faulty interpretations happen; and Meeks concludes that the believing community should hear as many voices as possible in order to apply texts to life. This chapter is followed by an impressive listing of works by Luke Timothy Johnson, of whose life and work this volume is worthy. I highly recommend it.

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