

# Book reviews

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William Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds. *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Repr., 2008. Pp. xxi + 217.

This volume comprises eleven essays, plus two introductory essays, related to suffering and martyrdom. Seven of the essays speak to New Testament texts and themes, three cover pertinent issues in early Judaism and Christianity, and the final essay deals with dogmatics. The occasion for this volume, which was originally published in 1981, is to honor G. M. Styler, the long-time secretary of the historic Cambridge New Testament Seminar, which C. F. D. Moule sketches in his first prefatory essay. Moule's second prefatory essay serves as a general introduction to the volume, and concludes with some questionable comments that speak of the universality of Jesus's suffering for all humanity in contrast to an exclusive, vicarious suffering on behalf of some. He further suggests that no courageous witness to truth is far from the cross of Christ, even if it comes from outside the bounds of confessing Christianity (p. 8). However, he provides no supporting argument for these remarks.

The first substantial chapter is by J. C. O'Neill and asks whether Jesus viewed his own death as a vicarious sacrifice. The author (rightly) concludes in the affirmative, though this essay is not without problems. O'Neill's approach seeks to adjudicate between the text of the Gospels and what the historical Jesus "actually" said. This approach, however, is riddled with difficulties, and is unnecessary for those who view the texts as divinely given; attempting to get "behind" the text is not where exegesis should tarry. Practically, it is not possible to splice off portions of the Gospels as more or

less authentic, since all the details in the Gospels are mediated through the theological presentation of the Evangelists. Additionally, the author views the ransom terminology (*lytron*) from the so-called ransom logion (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)—two of the most important texts in which Jesus speaks of the purpose of his death—as corrupted, opting instead for variant readings. However ingenious his arguments are, his view is not persuasive, not least because of the dearth of textual evidence supporting his view. Additionally, the author concludes that Jesus’s words on suffering were originally intended only for a limited number of his closest disciples. Therefore, says the author, the historical Jesus never intended for all his disciples to have to take up their crosses and follow him. The author’s discussion on the atonement is similarly in need of greater nuance, since he ascribes some sort of atoning power even to the death of martyrs (though he also maintains some sort of uniqueness for the death of Christ).

The second essay by Brian E. Beck focuses on Jesus’s death as martyrdom in Luke’s Gospel. Beck reads the suffering of Jesus more in light of the Wisdom of Solomon than Isaiah 53, and therefore sees little emphasis on expiation in the suffering of Jesus (pp. 43–44). Beck concludes that Jesus’s death in Luke is to be viewed from one perspective as martyrdom, but also entails other themes. However, among these other themes Beck does not see substitutionary atonement as a Lukan emphasis. Unfortunately, he does not deal adequately with the covenantal words of institution in Luke 22, which must be considered for a full picture of Luke’s understanding of the death of Christ. Though the parallels to martyrdom traditions are noteworthy, it would be wrong to discount notions of substitution in Luke. The author concludes with some thoughts about the uniqueness of Jesus’s messianic martyrdom, but this uniqueness is not satisfactorily explored in his essay.

The third essay, by Barnabas Lindars, focuses on the Gospel of John. More precisely, Lindars uses the Gospel as we have it to reconstruct the persecution faced by the Johannine community. Here source criticism is key, as Lindars reads John 15:18–16:4a in light of the perceived development of persecution that arose between the posited first and second version of John’s Gospel. Lindars believes much of John 15–16 goes back to Jesus himself, though we can also identify later redactional elements. Lindars would even have us imagine John at work in his study, reworking the Gospel traditions and other sources that made their way—fully integrated, yet identifiable (?)—into the final version of the Gospel (p. 55). This line of investigation, however, yields limited fruit. If one were to doubt a complex literary history of John, then much of his discussion is unnecessary.

Nevertheless, Lindars does provide some helpful structural observations on portions of the Farewell Discourse. All told, Lindars sees the most dire warning of Jesus in his selected text to come in 16:2c-d (“when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God,” p. 65), and he argues for a positive place of martyrdom in the framework of Jesus’s own sacrifice (p. 66).

The volume then turns its attention to Paul. In the fourth essay, Morna Hooker looks at suffering in light of her understanding of Paul’s theology of “interchange,” which sounds something like participation or union. Interestingly, Hooker believes Paul saw Jesus to be a representative, but not a substitute, averring that substitution is not central to Paul. Readers of this collection will likely not be surprised that Hooker does not base her conclusions on the so-called “disputed” Pauline epistles, which means the testimony of books such as Ephesians and Titus are not adequately considered, without which I do not believe our understanding of Paul’s theology is sufficiently robust. Hooker’s essay concludes that we must suffer with Christ, which can be affirmed, even if her scope remains limited, and some unnecessary dichotomies remain in her articulation (e.g., representation vs. substitution). Hooker implies that to believe in Jesus as a substitute would negate the need for Christians to suffer (p. 82), but rightly understood, this does not follow.

In the fifth essay, W. F. Flemington focuses on “filling up the sufferings of Christ in my flesh” in Colossians 1:24, a text which Hooker also mentions briefly. Flemington focuses particularly on the phrase “in my flesh,” suggesting it has often been overlooked in explanations of the passage. Flemington proposes that Colossians 1:24 means we must participate in Christ’s sufferings—what is lacking is not Christ’s afflictions, but “the afflictions of Christ as they are reflected and reproduced in the life and behavior of Paul” (p. 87), and also all those who are “in Christ” (p. 88).

The sixth essay, by E. Bammel, considers the term *sainesthai* (“to be troubled”) in 1 Thessalonians 3:3. Bammel studies the term in its Jewish context, concluding that it means to be troubled about the turmoil of the last days. For Paul, it is not inevitable that Christians will be shaken or troubled at the end; instead, they are to stand firm (*stēkein*, pp. 98–99), as the Thessalonians indeed seemed to have done.

The seventh essay, by J. P. M. Sweet, considers the concept of witness in Revelation. Sweet summarizes Christ’s death under the double rubric of sacrifice and victory, and looks at the suffering of Christians in Revelation in light of these themes. Sweet argues that Christian witness leads to suffering in Revelation (cf. Rev 11), but the raising of the two witnesses in Revelation 11

shows us that their vindication, not death, is the last word, inasmuch as their situation echoes that of Christ (p. 108). In the end, Sweet leaves room for mystery in how victory comes through sacrifice.

The eighth essay, by G. W. H. Lampe, marks a shift in focus that goes beyond Scripture to early Christianity, and considers notions of inspiration and pneumatology in relation to early Christian martyrdom. The key claim for early Christians was “Jesus is Lord,” and Lampe posits a more offensive, rather than defensive, posture of early Christian martyrs. Lampe argues that the Holy Spirit was understood to inspire martyrs to profess Jesus as Christ, which follows on the understanding of the Old Testament prophets as (inspired) martyrs.

The ninth and tenth essays may be best suited for those with specialized interests, since the essays consider martyrdom in the Odes of Solomon (Brian McNeil) and in the circa fifth century Jewish poet Yose ben Yose (William Horbury). The latter of these two is particularly noteworthy as an in-depth study (40 pages) that compares and contrasts the understanding of suffering and martyrdom of an early Jewish poet to that of the New Testament. The final essay by Nicholas Lash asks: “what might martyrdom mean?” The author identifies some salient issues worthy of discussion, such as the need for New Testament scholars to address what the text means for today. Lash further challenges New Testament scholars on the issue of truth, asking whether they can answer the question “Was Jesus right?” Though in places Lash’s own discussion leaves something to be desired, he helpfully notes the importance of finding answers that are relevant for the living, Christian community (p. 196).

All told, this volume will be of limited benefit today. To be sure, it will be of use to those who are studying, most likely in a scholarly fashion, the specific texts and issues addressed, but it will not serve well as an integrated and systematic account of the issues. This is in large part due to the nature of the essays, which are narrow in scope and often exploratory. The essays on the Gospels appear to be particularly dated, whereas the studies on Paul and Revelation will likely be of greater relevance. Additionally, these essays do not represent a unified theology of the issues, and this reviewer saw the need for more integration and theological precision throughout. Indeed, many of the questions posed in the volume, while valid, have been sufficiently answered elsewhere. Thus, for example, one will find more thorough discussions of the atonement in scripturally faithful biblical and systematic theology texts. These discussions would also benefit by being placed in the already/not-yet framework of New Testament eschatology that is now standard fare in much scholarship.

In *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, the reader encounters a collation of scholarly essays from some great minds of twentieth century New Testament scholarship whose vast learning is evident with each turn of page. However, for those wanting an integrated understanding of the issues canvassed, this work should be supplemented with studies that take more of a synthetic and biblical-theological approach and which consider a more complete range of relevant texts.

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Shelly Matthews. *Perfect Martyr: The Stoning of Stephen and the Construction of Christian Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. viii + 226.

Bryan M. Litfin. *Early Christian Martyr Stories: An Evangelical Introduction with New Translations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. Pp. vii +180.

Both of these volumes tell the stories of early Christian martyrs, but from different angles. While Shelly Matthews focuses on Stephen, Bryan Litfin deals primarily with the church fathers. While Matthews explores early Jewish opposition, Litfin uncovers the widespread antagonism of the Roman Empire. While Matthews is greatly skeptical about the historicity of Stephen's account, Litfin is much more confident about the historical reliability of the sources. Finally, Matthews deals with the canonical Acts but places it in a second century setting and interacts with patristic interpretations of Acts. Litfin, apart from a foray into the Maccabean Martyrs, deals with Christian martyrs up to the time of Augustine, paying attention to the integration of the Bible in these accounts.

Matthews is now a professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School. Besides her focus on New Testament studies, she also has interest in Patristic studies. Her involvement in the Jesus Seminar is perhaps reflected in some of the views argued for in *Perfect Martyr*, such as her skepticism toward the historicity of Stephen's account and the emphasis on Jesus's teaching on love for enemies. The research of her book grew out of her involvement in a group of the Society of Biblical Literature, studying violence and the publication of *Violence in the New Testament* (2005) of which she was one of the editors.

Matthews proposes new and radical views on a topic not often dealt with, the martyrdom of Stephen. Some of her proposals challenge well established