

Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature, by Lee Martin McDonald and Stanley E. Porter. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000. Pp. xxvii + 708 pp.*

Lee McDonald, a principal and professor of NT studies at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, Canada, and Stanley Porter, now principal, dean, and professor of NT at McMaster University have teamed up to produce a comprehensive presentation of the sacred literature of early Christianity. After dealing with foundational issues such as the interplay between history and faith, the role of critical methodology, the transmission of the writings of the NT, the history of early Christianity, and the formation of the Christian canon, the authors discuss the various documents, personalities, and issues outside the NT in an effort to introduce students to the literature and world of the early followers of Jesus.

As a teacher of NT introduction courses in the past, I regularly found myself in the position to use, not one, but three books: one on introductory issues such as canon, transmission of text, translations, and the doctrine of Scripture; one on the Second temple period and NT background; and one on introductory issues related to the NT documents themselves. The present volume commendably combines these three aspects into one. Chapter three particularly brings together a considerable amount of valuable material on the Second temple period and its history and literature, rabbinic literature and Jewish sects, and Graeco-Roman cultural religious backgrounds.

Introductions to the NT will inevitably reflect the viewpoint of the author(s), and the present volume is no exception. This is evident already in the works selected for inclusion in the subject bibliographies at the end of a given chapter. Generally, these are fairly comprehensive, but I was surprised to find that Carson, Moo, and Morris's *Introduction to the New Testament* was not included in the listing of NT introductions on page 38. Also, one wonders why George Ladd's *Theology of the New Testament* is included in the bibliography on page 41 but not Donald Guthrie's. The fact that six of nine items listed under linguistic criticism are by Porter and J. T. Reed may not quite be proportionate to the work done in this field.

On a different note, there is a very helpful and fairly extensive discussion on the date of Jesus' birth on pages 119-21, but there does not seem to be an equivalent discussion of the date of Jesus' crucifixion (though the chart on p. 648 lists A.D. 29-30 as a 'firmer date' in NT chronology). Overall, the discussions on various topics do not always reflect the same degree of thoroughness, which may be difficult to avoid in a collaborative work. An example of a rather surface treatment is the survey of offices in the early church (227-28). The Gospels are discussed in the order Mark -- Luke -- Matthew; the lack of serious discussion of alternatives to Markan priority may prove to alienate some, though in a work like this it is clearly impossible to please everyone.

Generally, the positions adopted in the present volume are more conservative than mainstream critical scholarship but less conservative than more traditional viewpoints, which may make it difficult for either camp to embrace this work as sufficiently reflective of their own beliefs and concerns. On a concluding note, my personal preference based on classroom experience would have been to place the last three chapters on the text and transmission of the NT, the canon, and apocrypha and pseudepigrapha in an earlier juncture in the volume rather than at the very end. These minor criticisms notwithstanding, this is a valuable new resource which teachers of NT introduction would do well to consider.

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*This review first appeared in *Themelios* 28/3 (2003): 90-91 and is posted with permission.

