

BOOK REVIEWS

Boxall, Ian. *Discovering Matthew: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. DBT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ix + 206 pp. Softcover, US\$22.00.

Ian Boxall is associate professor of New Testament at The Catholic University of America. He previously taught New Testament at Chichester Theological College and the University of Oxford. He has published a number of books, including *The Revelation of St John* (Black's New Testament Commentaries) and *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford University Press).

Discovering Matthew has twelve substantial chapters followed by a short concluding chapter. As such, it would make an appropriate undergraduate textbook. Chapter 1 contains a historical survey of the status of the Gospel and the shift in critical scholarship from Matthean to Markan priority. This is followed by a description of what Boxall deems to be a number of "contradictory elements" within the Gospel (e.g., universalism vs. particularism, "Jewish" and "anti-Jewish" statements, mercy vs. judgment). These tensions are left unresolved, thus setting the agenda for the rest of the book. The chapter concludes with an overview of the Gospel's plot.

The second chapter presents various critical approaches used to interpret Matthew. Boxall argues that the quest for univocal meaning characteristic of both historical criticism, with its emphasis on authorial intention and original context, and narrative criticism, with its focus on the meaning of the text, contrasts with both precritical and postmodern approaches. Precritical patristic exegesis recognized multiple levels of meaning in the text, whether literal, spiritual, or allegorical. Boxall suggests that this approach rings true with postmodern expectations that texts embody a plethora of meanings.

In chapter three, Boxall discusses background questions, such as authorship, dating, structure, textual variants, and auditory experience. He follows the majority of critical Matthean scholarship in accepting Markan priority and rejecting the apostle Matthew as author. He accepts a post-70-CE dating based upon the widely held belief that Matt 22:7 alludes to the burning of Jerusalem. In chapter 4, Boxall uses narrative criticism to analyze Matthew's characters and settings.

The fifth chapter focuses on the historical and social location of the Gospel. Boxall presents evidence that the early Church Fathers read Matthew with the conviction that the evangelist wrote for a Jewish audience. For Boxall, this picture is nuanced by the fact that Matthew both affirms and criticizes traditional Jewish beliefs and practices. Boxall favors an *intra muros* Christian Jewish Matthean community as the intended readership. Precise identification of the Gospel's geographical setting adds little, however, to the interpretation of the Gospel. Instead, Boxall suggests that it is more important to "posit an appropriate imaginative setting" (74). He suggests first-century Capernaum as a fruitful location in which to imagine the reception of the Gospel.

Boxall turns to the "infancy narratives" in chapter 6. He presents and assesses the differences between Matt 1–2 and Luke 1–2 and concludes that

Matthew's technique is that of "creative historiography" (77). He suggests that this section of the Gospel serves the christological function of introducing Jesus and the apologetic function of addressing possible Jewish objections to the nature of his birth and origins.

Chapter seven covers Jesus as teacher. Boxall discusses various discourses in the Gospel and accepts the suggestion of Ulrich Luz that those discourses directed toward the disciples are transparent in nature. They were addressed not just to "the original audiences of the evangelist's own time, but to the Church throughout history" (94). Boxall then focuses on the contents and reception history of the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of Matt 13. He ends with a discussion of prominent themes in Jesus' teachings, namely, judgment, apocalyptic revelation, and the Son of Man. He also defends the evangelist against those modern readers who critique him for holding a "fire and brimstone" theology.

In the eighth chapter, Jesus is presented as healer and exorcist. Boxall categorizes Matthew's miracles according to type and defends them as reflections of the earliest Christian traditions. Matthew presents Mark's miracles in a strikingly concise manner, thus enabling them to function as transparent examples, giving "Christian readers in the present confidence that they can approach the risen Lord for their own needs" (111). As well as being transparent, Matthew's miracle stories are "sympathetic" to "a more symbolic interpretation," a well-known example being Günther Bornkamm's reading of the boat in the storm as transparent to the Church in the post-Easter period.

In chapter nine Boxall discusses the evangelist's use of and relationship to the Law and the Prophets. Matthew's citations of the Old Testament are deemed to reflect his own creativity, reliance on his memory, and use of a variety of Old Testament textual traditions. The Matthean Jesus affirms the Law, whether it be in relation to Sabbath observance, dietary laws, or grounds for divorce.

Boxall considers the role of Peter and the relationship between Matthew's community and formative Judaism in chapter 10. He argues against supersessionism and reads the reference in Matt 21:43 "to a people (*ἔθνη*)" producing the fruits of the kingdom as denoting not the Gentiles, but a "company" or "group of people" (137). The move is not from Jews to Gentiles, but rather a change in Israel's leadership from the Jerusalem elite to the followers of Jesus.

Chapter 11 covers the death of Jesus. Boxall does not prioritize one explanation of Jesus' death. Instead, he suggests that Jesus' death simultaneously represents the righteous sufferer of the Psalms, the silent servant of Isaiah, the obedient Son of God, and Zechariah's stricken shepherd. In addition, the death of Jesus is presented as the shedding of innocent blood. The natural phenomena surrounding the death of Jesus mark it out as the dawn of the new age.

In the twelfth chapter, Boxall compares Matthew's resurrection account with Jewish resurrection expectations and the other canonical Gospels. He concludes with an exploration of possible Old Testament motifs in the

Gospel Commission. The thirteenth and concluding chapter offers a number of reflections on the nature of the Gospel.

I now move to an assessment of Boxall's work. In general, this is a highly informative and detailed introduction to Matthew. It is well researched and demonstrates a deep awareness of the Gospel, relevant critical approaches, and reception history. On most critical issues, he reflects the consensus position held by Matthean scholarship. I would offer three main critiques.

First, the order and organization of material in the first five chapters is not always apparent. This is not to argue that there is no order. It is simply to make the point that particular effort is required of the reader in the case of a number of these chapters to work out their respective purposes. A clear statement of purpose in the respective opening paragraphs or pages would have considerably helped. In contrast, the second half of the book (chapters six to twelve) is easier to follow in that the contents reflect the order of the Gospel.

Secondly, as an introductory text, it would be easy to critique *Discovering Matthew* for omission or superficiality. Such criticism is a cheap shot at a book that does not set out to provide a comprehensive treatment of the Gospel. Nevertheless, it is important to be clear as to what is included and what is left out. The main strength of this book is that it covers reception history in a degree of detail not typically found in introductions to the Gospel. This is helpful and allows the reader to situate his or her own interpretation within a wider context. This benefit, however, comes at a cost. The downside is that less treatment is given to the Gospel itself. Boxall typically applies four approaches to the Gospel: first, he describes and analyses a portion of the Gospel; second, he compares Matthew's account with those of his contemporary evangelists, with emphasis on identifying redactional nuances unique to the first Gospel; third, he provides historical examples of the impact the Gospel has made, and fourth, he discusses critical approaches to the text. The result is an almost overwhelming degree of information and detail. The impact on this particular reader was the sense that the Gospel, while of unquestionable importance for Boxall, nevertheless serves as a springboard to discussions of issues of secondary importance for discovering Matthew's intention. It is very easy to lose sight of the evangelist and his message amidst the throng of his fellow evangelists, later interpreters, and contemporary scholars.

Third, Boxall's hermeneutical approach tends to downplay the role of authorial intention and the Gospel as a *bios* about Jesus. He reads the Gospel as "capable of meaning several things" beyond the intention of the author (175). This partly results from the "range of possible intertextual allusions" to different portions of the Old Testament (176). In addition, he reads the Gospel as a reflection of the Matthean community's situation. The Gospel simultaneously reflects the time of Jesus and the time of composition. In practice, however, the result of this approach is a focus on Matthew's redactional emphasis and those Gospel characters deemed to reflect the Matthean community and formative Judaism. A corrective to this approach would be a stronger emphasis on the relationship between the Gospel and the historical Jesus. I would also have preferred more on the Gospel's theology, Christology,

and soteriology. We are provided with just under one page on God as a character in the Gospel (47–48). This compares with fairly lengthy examples throughout the book of the impact the Gospel has made in art and music.

In conclusion, this is a well-written introduction to Matthew. It is ambitious in its scope. It may be a little overly ambitious for those readers whose primary objective is to discover the mind and message of Matthew.

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Chin, Catherine M., and Moulie Vidas, eds. *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014. 297 pp. Hardcover, US\$95.00.

While learning modern Hebrew in Jerusalem, I had a teacher who used to say to her students, “If you don’t know, you don’t ask.” Although she was referring to our ignorance, as foreigners, of the complexity of the Hebrew language, her dictum portrays well how humans grow in their intellectual journey. It is probable that if we do not know our history and the strange world of the past (the ancient other), we might not know ourselves properly. *Late Ancient Knowing* is a good collection of essays that will enhance the reader’s perception of this important but mostly neglected past.

Very few, if any, in Late Antiquity questioned autocracy, slavery, or other social institutions. They just assumed them as an integral part of their reality. Were these assumed by Paul and the first Christians? If yes, why? Surely, no one should dismiss the impact of ancient knowing upon the formation of Christianity. The existence of supernatural beings and their action affecting human lives were also unquestioned. Ideas such as these shaped ancient worldview(s), their way of knowing things. Humans, however, are not static, and therefore new knowledge was discovered because of curiosity and because new questions were asked concerning old readings of reality. Societies in the centuries following the life of Jesus underwent not only a religious transformation but an epistemological one that influenced present worldviews. The Christianization of great parts of the Roman and Persian empires opened new ways for their members to see the world. But Christianity was not the only intellectual force shaping ancient epistemology.

Late Ancient Knowing gathers articles with different perspectives, addressing different themes through different kinds of focus. It brings a collection of essays from Jewish, Christian, and Pagan perspectives on thirteen themes: artifact, animal, language, medicine, cosmos, angel, god, emperor, ordo (order), Christianization, cleric, countryside, and demon. These themes will help the reader to see/understand ancient epistemology and shed some light on this fascinating period of human civilization, unfortunately unknown to most of us.

The introduction and afterword summarize major points of the book. Ancient people saw their world as a complex organism, leading them to use different epistemological approaches to try to systematize their knowledge of it. Late Ancient knowing was the “habit of systematization built on