

the doing of Halakhic rituals', regarding rituals as a form of language (Chapter Four). The concluding chapters address 'sacrifices in biblical literature and ritual theory', with special attention to Hubert and Mauss, Jacob Milgrom on *Leviticus*, and 'the 'Lord's supper and ritual theory', the study of the Pauline letters in light of the study of rituals. Here he addresses van Gennep, Stanley Tambiah, and other theorists of ritual (Chapter Five). He ends with an analysis of 1 *Corinthians* 10–11 and concludes with remarks on Bruce Kapferer's views on sacrificial rituals (Chapter Six). The bibliography is comprehensive, the notes economical and instructive.

Gruenwald has now integrated the academic study of Judaism into the academic study of religion, treating Judaism as a source of illuminating cases and problems of general interest and intelligibility. Few have attempted what he has succeeded in doing, and in these pages the academic study of Judaism has come of age. He here joins the principal theorists of religion of our times.

JACOB NEUSNER

THE NAVARRE BIBLE: THE PSALMS AND THE SONG OF SOLOMON with a commentary by members of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Navarre, *Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2003, Pp. 528, £30.00, hbk.*

Marie-Joseph Lagrange, during the ceremony of the inauguration of the Ecole Biblique in 1890, said: 'In the Bible, God gave human intellect a never-ending task to perform, and opened up an unlimited field of progress towards the truth'. Numerous biblical translations and commentaries which have seen the light of day up until now give evidence that the French scholar was right. The same conviction must have been shared by the members of the theological faculty at the University of Navarre, who have prepared a new Spanish translation and commentary to the Bible. In 2003 the English reader was given the fourth volume of *The Navarre Bible: Old Testament*, containing the text and extensive notes to the Psalms and the Song of Solomon.

The first impression the book gives is very encouraging. Every page has a well-planned layout which helps to find quickly and easily a suitable biblical passage and its corresponding commentary. The cross references in the marginal notes allow the reader to find other biblical texts which concern the same or similar topic. Yet it is surprising that the parallel text of the New Vulgate, which is found at the bottom of every page, does not match the text of the English translation: thus we find the Latin counterpart of Ps 135:13 two pages before the English text (pp. 436 and 438). This certainly does not make work with the text easy. The same problem occurs with the

commentary: while the translation of Ps 113:1–7 is placed on p. 379, the commentary is found one page later. Taking into account the technical possibilities offered by modern text-processors, such a flaw could have been avoided without difficulty.

The most important advantage of the commentary is its diversity of sources. Following the postulates of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, it is based upon a wide range of writings by the Church Fathers, ecclesiastical and spiritual writers, as well as church documents (cf. pp. 523–5). Every reader interested in the history of the influence of the text may use both the introductory parts and the commentary as a basic reference tool to help further study of this approach. It is particularly valuable, since we do not often get practical and modern commentaries which would draw on numerous patristic sources. Moreover, the character of the commentary continually reminds us and demonstrates the truth that the Old Testament writings, apart from their great independent value, are the preparation for the New Testament and the New Covenant. The careful reader will certainly notice that this is one of the main threads uniting the whole exposition of the biblical text in *The Navarre Bible*. Bearing in mind that some modern commentators tend to dissect the text and to lose its broad perspective, this feature of the book seems especially interesting.

Another benefit of *The Navarre Bible* is its practical, straightforward presentation of the topic, which is by no means an oversimplification. Readers who seek a basic and good introduction to the Psalms and the Song of Solomon will surely profit from the remarks on the unity of the language to express human and divine love (p. 481), or on the religious message and theology of the psalms (pp. 28–32).

The commentary has, however, a number of features which do not allow us to regard it as a very good work worth recommending. First and foremost, unlike in the Spanish edition, we do not get a new English translation of the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, but a somewhat artificial combination of the RSV text and the English translation of the Spanish commentary. Additionally, the editors remind us that ‘the Spanish original of this work was a much more substantial undertaking than might appear from the English edition’, saying thus, indirectly, that what the English reader gets is only a less substantial achievement. Hence, if one reads a sentence like, ‘To make their translation, Navarre editors followed the Hebrew text where possible; when that made no sense, they went to the Greek for guidance’ (p. 20), what one knows for sure is not whether following the Hebrew text made sense, but that translating such remarks into English did not make any practical sense.

Some minor inconsistencies in the book can be observed. The author of the introduction to the Song of Solomon informs us in the first paragraph that the Song is ‘disconcerting, because it contains

no mention of God (except for an allusion in 8:6)' (p. 481). A curious reader, who does not know Hebrew, may search for the explanation of the allusion to no avail, because neither the text nor the commentary says anything about it. Similarly, the statement, 'The allegorical exegesis begun in the New Testament . . .' (p. 488), which is grounded in the considerations of the preceding paragraph, seems rather unconvincing. What is more, even though both introductory parts give a clear and positive presentation of knowledge, which is an advantage, the authors do not mention any moot points or questions which still await an answer. As a result, they create the impression that everything is well-known and obvious. Yet the lack of questions and the absence of discussion may limit to some extent the intellectual horizons of the readers.

The final evaluation of the book depends, naturally, on what we expect from it. If our personal purpose accords with the words on the cover, 'the commentaries, or notes, help to explain the doctrinal and practical meaning of the scriptural text, drawing on a rich variety of sources', we will be most likely content with its scope and the manner of presentation. For a specialist, there will be little new to be gained from the book; but for a layman, it might be an excellent invitation to study the text with the aid of more comprehensive works. While the former can safely ignore it, the latter will appreciate it as a basic introduction. In any case, one thing will remain unchanged. Provided that the Spanish original, as stated by the editors, is a more significant undertaking, it might be reasonable to learn Spanish and to buy the original instead.

KRZYSZTOF P. SONEK OP

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY: A SURVEY OF RECENT STUDIES AND SOME NEW PROPOSALS by Gerd Lüdemann, *T&T Clark, Continuum, London, 2003, Pp. xii + 218, £19.99 pbk.*

This book is no easy read – and not just because the font size shrinks to almost nothing on a regular basis. It is clearly not meant as an accessible study with the general reader or undergraduate in view. It is exactly what its title claims it to be, a critical review in the first instance of how certain scholars in the last thirty years, many of them German, have reconstructed the history of Christianity in the first two centuries after the birth of Christ, looking above all at the account these scholars give of communities behind the New Testament texts. After the brief introduction chapters are devoted to 'conventional' studies, studies 'from the perspective of feminist theology', studies on social history, on Christianity in particular cities (Rome, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus), and on particular topics within Early Church