Johannine theme of unity and the quest for holiness, especially as it appears in the final discourse of John 17.


Carter, professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, writes explicitly for the beginning college or graduate student who is embarking on a serious study of the gospels. His opening segment defines the literary genre of a gospel by a close comparison with the literary genre of ancient biography. He then turns to the development of the traditions about Jesus between his death and the composition of the gospels. The bulk of the volume is a two-stage analysis of each gospel—first recounting the specific narrative and then fitting the distinctive features of each gospel into its probable social and religious context. A concluding chapter provides a well-balanced discussion of the formation of the canon and the scholarship devoted to the quest for the historical Jesus. Carter’s perspective throughout is theologically neutral and even handed, certainly allowing openings for either a religious studies or theological interpretation of the texts. Most unfortunate, in my view, is the choice of the title for this otherwise helpful work. “Telling Tales” in my experience conjures up the idea of gossip or pure fiction—a view of the gospels that this carefully crafted textbook does not hold.


This study of the letter of James views it from a modern “postcolonial” perspective. Coker, a lecturer at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven and a Baptist pastor, portrays the author of James and its theology as representative of early Jewish Christian leadership in the Jerusalem community, espousing a strong Jewish identity for Christianity—that is, a “nativist” perspective over against the kind of accommodation to the Greco-Roman world (or, in Coker’s terminology, “hybridization”) espoused by Paul. Coker’s analysis of James is intriguing and carefully argued but, as he acknowledges, many other commentators doubt that James directly confronts Paul’s theology.


With this volume on John, revered Irish biblical scholar Wilfrid Harrington completes his introductions to the four gospels. This study, like its companion works, provides a sure guide for the lay reader who wants to plunge deeper into the beauty and challenges of the distinctive features of John’s gospel. Harrington begins with the usual introductory questions of background, authorship, and structure. He then provides a sketch of the unique features of John’s portrayal of Jesus. The remainder of the work is not a verse-by-verse commentary but an overview of the various themes and movements of the gospel as he works his way through the narrative and discourses of John.