

Terrance Callan, *Acknowledging the Divine Benefactor: The Second Letter of Peter*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014. Pp. xiii + 220. ISBN 9781625648266. Paperback, \$28.00.

- [1] The author of this commentary, published not within an established series, has already extensively published on 2 Peter before, that is, in a number of articles and a more popular commentary in the Paideia series.¹ Unlike that verse-by-verse exposition of rhetorical devices and meaning in 2 Peter, this commentary is much more technical in its arrangement of the information given and also in the terminology used.
- [2] Callan follows in his analysis the so-called sociorhetorical interpretation developed by the Emory scholar Vernon K. Robbins² that has become fashionable among some North American exegetes who want to keep a certain distance from theological interpretation (particularly in its American forms) and to stick to aspects of religious science or social science, in particular the rhetoric of the texts. The sociorhetorical interpretation describes the texture of texts in deliberate distance from their ideological claims and, therefore, develops a particular terminology that is sometimes alienating and not always helpful for exegetical communication. This method is presented in the introduction, as without the knowledge of the terms and their definition, the commentary is not easy to understand.
- [3] The various aspects of textual analysis are presented under the label “texture”: “inner texture” (= structure), “intertexture” (= reference to other texts and realities), “social and cultural texture” (i.e., cultural and social codes), “ideological texture” (conflicts, alliances, relation to certain groups), and “sacred texture” (i.e., religious or theological content). Thus, classical exegetical questions are presented in a new terminological framework, which possibly defamiliarizes the texts but does not really insert any new questions that could not be posed in conventional terms of a culturally and rhetorically sensitive interpretation.
- [4] Furthermore, there is a kind of presupposed structure of six discourses (called “rhetorolects”), which are present and often interwoven in the texts. These are “wisdom discourse,” “miracle discourse,” “prophetic discourse,” “pre-creation discourse,” “priestly discourse,” and “apocalyptic discourse.” These discourses are explained in the methodological preliminaries of the commentary (2–3), and, according to Robbins, they form the “rhetography” of the texts.³
- [5] The effect of the application of the method in the present commentary affects in particular the structure of the presentation, but this is not without influence on the understanding of the text. For each pericope or part of the argument, there is first a presentation of the Greek text (according to the UBS 4th edition of the Greek New Testament) and a translation. Then, the classical exegetical issues are presented in the form outlined above (in “texture” terminology), before the various discourses are addressed, as far as they are represented in the respective

¹ Terrance Callan, “Second Peter,” in *First and Second Peter*, ed. Duane F. Watson and Terrance Callan, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 129–219.

² Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

³ Cf. Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text,” in *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy’s Rhetoric of the New Testament*, ed. Duane K. Watson and Clifton C. Black (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 81–106.

portion of the text. But as these discourses are presented separately, although they are interwoven in the text, the presentation not only is somewhat repetitious but also is often torn into various parts. In my view, this is less helpful for understanding the rhetoric of the text than a conventional commentary arrangement with a verse-by-verse interpretation, following the rhetorical and ideological moves of the text and inserting necessary explanations within that sequence. Furthermore, the schematic structure of the six discourses mentioned above not only alienates the text by using descriptive categories but also imposes a certain understanding of those categories and discourses on the text, and it is by no means clear whether the categories are appropriate or should be modified. What is meant by “wisdom,” “apocalyptic,” “miracle,” “prophetic,” “priestly,” or even “pre-creation”? Do they make up the whole of possible rhetorical discourses, or are they a selection, to be supplemented by others or to be modified with regard to certain texts? Here we see the same methodological problem as we find with all descriptive scholarly categories (from *apocalyptic* to *Gnosticism*): they are not rooted in the ancient texts and thus necessarily insert additional elements and transmit a certain understanding. When the headings, then, sound like “Christology and Christography” or “Eschatology and Eschatology,” this is simply an odd play that brings no further clarification or precision. In my view, the exegetical or interpretive gain of the fashionable Robbins method is close to none. It makes the exegetical discourse idiosyncratic and more complicated, but there is no additional profit from the interpretation.

- [6] But now—after these methodological considerations—let us focus on the commentary: Callan’s understanding of the epistle is in line with the critical majority views, with a particular focus on rhetorical devices. His most-quoted witnesses are the works by Richard Bauckham (who is, of course, more conservative) and Jerome Neyrey (with his focus on cultural studies). Callan joins the majority view that 2 Peter is pseudonymous and written in the first half of the second century, in the time span between 100 and 140 CE; that it has the form of a testamentary letter, addressed not to a particular community but to all Christians; and that its main and consistent topic is the defense of the expectation of the parousia. He describes the style of the epistle as grand in the context of Asianism (i.e., the epistle’s grand style as a form of Asianism)—but here he mostly relies on secondary literature, and important non-English titles (such as, e.g., the work by T. J. Kraus) are not noticed. He provides a large number of intertextual relations, with Old Testament texts but also with the gospels, Matthew and John (here, above all, 21:18 in 2 Pet 1:14–15), and 1 Peter. And, of course, he acknowledges that the middle part of 2 Peter is a free rephrasing of many elements from Jude. He does not consider the relationship with other Petrine writings, thus the parallels with the Apocalypse of Peter are not considered at all. Because of Bauckham’s discussion of the matter, this was not an urgent need for him, and the most recent discussion, launched by Wolfgang Grünstäudl’s intense argument for a dependence of 2 Peter on the Apocalypse of Peter⁴ and now also adopted in my commentary,⁵ was too late for Callan’s work.

⁴ Wolfgang Grünstäudl, *Petrus Alexandrinus. Studien zu historischen und theologischen Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes*, WUNT 2/353 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

⁵ Jörg Frey, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, THKNT 15.2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015); English translation: *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter. A Theological Commentary*, trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018).

- [7] It is interesting for the present journal that the massive textual problems of 2 Peter (esp. in 3:10 and 3:6) are not discussed at all. Callan note the passages where the ECM differs from the UBS edition of the GNT, but even at the passages where the ECM chooses (in my view not quite arbitrarily) a version that simply reverses the meaning of the text hitherto preferred, there is not further discussion. This is a matter where my own commentary enters the critical discussion with the reasoning of the ECM team.⁶
- [8] In Callan's commentary, the text is structured according to epistolographic criteria (letter opening, letter body in three parts, letter closing). Callan most extensively comments on the passage 1:3–11, which is, according to an important work by F. Danker, based on the form of an ancient honorary decree. Here, cultural studies, combined with solid philological work, really pay off. In 2 Pet 1, the relationship between the addressees and Christ is described in the culturally common terms, that is, the relationship between a benefactor and those who receive certain goods and are liable to render something to their benefactor: honor, obedience, loyalty, etc. Thus the exhortation to produce Christian virtues is presented within a particular system of plausibility derived from the cultural world of the addressees, which differs from the manner Christian parenesis is substantiated in earlier texts.
- [9] In his analysis of the charges against the opponents, Callan remains, in my view, too imprecise. He is quite aware that there are "conventional topics of vituperation" (144), which are used in various discourses and against various opponents and thus not necessarily describe the actual conduct of the opponents. But when commenting on the passages dealing with the angels (e.g., 2:11), Callan does not see that, in comparison with Jude, the mention of the angels in 2 Peter is strongly reduced and much less precise. Whereas the author of Jude precisely pointed to a disrespect of the angels (with various factual or at least imagined ethical consequences) as the main characteristic of the opponents, 2 Peter merely adopts the theme from its Vorlage but does not put any weight on it. Here, a more precise historical reading of the text could lead to more clarity.
- [10] Numerous other passages could be mentioned in which the author could have come to more precision if he had considered more strongly the historical or intertextual hints. This applies in particular to the interpretation of the references to Paul in 3:15–16, where the implicit distance (while claiming consensus) is not sufficiently unveiled. If 2 Peter claims that all letters of Paul confirms his view, the readers are confronted with a high claim of authority and with a distinct view of how the Pauline epistles should be read (and how they should not be read). So the question arises whether there is even a certain dispute on reading Paul's epistles or on the consequences to be drawn from the reading of Paul. Here, the issues of the historical location of 2 Peter could be freshly and more thoroughly discussed.
- [11] I also do not agree with the view that 2 Peter has an "introversionist" response to the world (18), that is, a tendency of withdrawing from the world. If we consider the intense interaction with contemporary philosophical discourse (on the eternity of the world) in chapter 3, we see that at least the author is an able and conscious participant in such discourses. It should be further qualified what the term "world" implies and which forms of sinful behavior are precisely meant that should be avoided. But the idea of an introversionist view is imported from

⁶ See Frey, *Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter*, 409–11.

other fields of cultural studies. Here, the Robbins method and their categories even prevent the author from a more precise perception of the text.

- [12] In conclusion, this small commentary provides a number of valuable insights, particularly on rhetorical and cultural issues. But the idiosyncratic terminology and the problems of the categories used (in close discipleship to Robbins and his method) seem to be more a burden than a gain with regard to the precise meaning of the text and the various discourses in which it is involved. In any case, the commentary shows the vivid interest in 2 Peter in more recent scholarship.

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