

grasp God entirely. But that is all right. We're human, and what John is trying to show us is that if we cling to the bits we know, then the Almighty will do the rest. God will comfort, Christ will save, and build us into a kingdom, and priests.

In the light of Easter, this is a useful position in which to find ourselves. We don't need to deny the resurrection because it doesn't make scientific sense.

We can legitimately state that we are on a different kind of territory when we work with our texts; we are exposing a different kind of truth. Humankind, we may rightly assert, would be much poorer without the possibility of truth veiled in ambiguity. It is our task and delight to accept, proclaim and rejoice in this glorious mystery. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, alleluia! AMEN.

COLLECTION OF NON-CANONICAL GOSPEL TEXTS

Andrew E. Bernhard, *Other Early Christian Gospels: A Critical Edition of the Surviving Greek Manuscripts* (London: T&T Clark International – A Continuum Imprint, 2006. £60.00. pp. xiv + 157 + 31 plates. ISBN 0-567-04204-9).

Bernhard defines the purpose of this book as being 'to collect all the recently recovered Greek manuscripts containing parts of early Christian gospels (other than Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) into a single volume' (pp. 1-2). Such a simple definition requires some unpacking. 'Early' refers to the period *c.* 30-130 CE, the first hundred years after the death of Jesus, and the term 'gospel' denotes any text that centres on the teachings or activities of Jesus during his adult life. This narrows the range of texts by excluding infancy gospels such as the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, while also enabling one to set aside some of the more esoteric texts labelled 'gospel' from Nag Hammadi. Thirteen Greek manuscripts are presented in this volume. Each section contains a brief introduction to the text in question, describing the discovery of the text (where known), the contents of the text and key details concerning its features and location, as well as bibliographic information. The Greek text is then presented with facing English translation and brief notes at the foot of the page. This format varies slightly at times, depending on the nature of the text in question.

An issue arises surrounding the confidence attributed to the dating of a number of texts. In relation to the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Unknown Gospel* Bernhard asserts that 'at least one surviving manuscript of each gospel can be reliably dated to the second hundred years of Christianity (*c.* 130-230 CE)' (p. 3). Taking the *Gospel of Peter* as an example, the major textual witness P.Cair. 10759 is dated on palaeographical grounds between the seventh and ninth centuries. It is extremely problematic to identify P.Oxy. 4009 as being part of the same text, since there is no shared material with P.Cair. 10759, and although P.Oxy. 2949 shows some points of contact, there are more examples of deviation. So it is not certain that there are manuscripts of the *Gospel of Peter* stemming from this period. Yet even if this were the case, just because a manuscript may date from say the year 200 CE, this does not automatically mean the text was written in the period 30-130 CE; it could just as plausibly have been written in the second half of the second century. The dating is driven by the ideological belief that the New Testament gospels gained pre-eminence by the mid-second century and this effectively ended the production of non-canonical gospels. The fact that such gospel texts were still being copied in the third century and beyond is damaging to the idea that the production of such texts stopped by the year 130 CE.

Despite reservation about the ideas that undergird this volume, it remains a helpful tool. This is likely to be a convenient reference for those who wish to consult either the Greek text or see photographic plates of these manuscripts.

PAUL FOSTER

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh