

DeMaris, Richard E. *The New Testament in Its Ritual World*. London: Routledge, 2008. 143 pp. Paper, \$37.95.

This brief work is built upon a significant but little-considered thesis: that “ritual is central to, and definitive for, early Christian life” (11). Decrying the lack of adequate attention to ritual in biblical studies, Richard E. DeMaris applauds the excellent first steps that have now been taken by scholars such as Christian Strecker and Risto Uro in the NT and Roy Gane and Gerald Klingbeil in the OT. The work of ritual-studies scholar Ronald Grimes is cited as a particularly valuable foundation for moving to deeper levels in this research, including his emphasis on thorough exploration of the context of the ritual under study, and the recognition that rites are not essentially symbolic or communicative.

The main part of the book seeks to demonstrate the value of such a ritual approach, first by application to the particular rite of baptism and then by demonstrating how integral ritual is to two NT topics not normally associated with ritual. The first half of the book, on “Entry Rites,” opens with a chapter contesting the simple assumption that baptism was ubiquitous in the NT as the entry rite to the Christian community. DeMaris argues that such assumptions obscure underlying conflicts regarding baptism, evident, for example, in 1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:5, 6, where Paul distances himself from the baptism of believers in Corinth, and in the plurality of baptisms suggested in Heb 4:4-6; 6:2. Rejecting baptism as initiation, due to its minimization of the ritually developed liminal/transition phase, DeMaris instead calls baptism a “boundary-crossing rite.” Such a rite, not unlike Victor Turner’s “transformation ritual,” is seen to reduce the threat involved in difficult social transitions such as believers often being forced to choose being cut off from original family and social bonds when moving into the fictive kinship of Christian community.

The second chapter carefully investigates the physical and cultural contexts of baptism in the city of Corinth. DeMaris demonstrates how the Romans manipulated and supplemented the earlier Greek water projects—including fountains, baths, aqueducts and harbors—in order to contribute to and exemplify Roman control in the region. In this context, he argues, emphasis on baptism in Corinth was, at least in part, a veiled reaction of native Greek believers to Roman domination. In DeMaris’s view, the rite of baptism in Corinth involved a symbolic inversion that both echoed the high regard given by Romans to bathing, yet applied such water use in an un-Roman way for cultic purposes, and in a one-time-only cultic ritual “that enabled entry into an alternative society beyond Roman hegemony (49).”

In the third chapter on “Entry Rites,” DeMaris suggests a novel answer to Paul’s vexing question in 1 Cor 15:29, asking: “If the dead are not at all raised, why are people baptized on their behalf?” Pointing out that other transition rites such as those at birth and death are often treated as metaphors for each other (e.g., Rom 6:3-4), DeMaris argues that baptism on behalf of the dead was practiced as a funerary boundary-crossing rite meant to help usher believers who have died, not now *into* the church but, in a sense, *outwards* “from

the circle of the living into the circle of the dead (64).” He supports this thesis by demonstrating the malleability of contemporary funerary practice in which funerary rites were conducted, for example, (1) vicariously without the body of the actual deceased present; (2) as a symbolic part of other ritual events such as retirements or feasts; or (3) even for purposes of self-aggrandizement while an individual still lived. An intense focus on death and the underworld in first-century Corinth and a flux in burial practices may have served to provoke this kind of innovation among Corinthian Christians.

In the second half of the book, dealing with “Exit Rites,” DeMaris considers ritual’s influence on texts as a whole rather than on direct references to a specific ritual. In “Paul’s Omphalos,” DeMaris argues that a coherent center to Paul’s theology is not to be found in the grounding of his ethics in his theology as Hays and others suggest. Rather Paul’s primary concern was with the purity and holiness of the community, which was to be evidenced by appropriate bodily actions. In the case of deviation, the carefully bounded community of holy ones was to be guarded from pollution, or nonconformity, by the enactment of exit rituals. DeMaris finds this to be illustrated in Paul’s counsel for dealing with the man who was sleeping with his father’s wife (1 Cor 5:1-8). In vv. 2-5, Paul calls for a cultic gathering and a ritual of funerary mourning in order to accomplish the ritual separation of the one bringing pollution into the group. Further, the justification for this call in vv. 6-8 is made by analogy to purification from defiling yeast.

Finally, DeMaris considers the meaning of Jesus’ agony and death in the Gospel of Mark, focusing on the horrible events of Jesus’ passion and on the statement attributed to Jesus in 14:24, “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.” Assuming the Gospel narrative to be Mark’s construction, he argues that Mark presents Jesus’ passion in terms of a curative exit rite. Such rites were common in the Greco-Roman world in two interrelated forms. One, more common in Greek society, was a *pharmakos* rite that disposed of an *internal* impurity by transferring the offense through status-degradation rites to a single individual who was then driven from the community. The second, practiced in Roman society, was an act of *devotion*, which dealt with an *external* danger by selecting an emissary or substitute upon whom is marshaled divine power to deflect or appease. In DeMaris’s view, Mark presents Jesus’ passion primarily as a *pharmakos* rite to show that such a shameful ending was necessary in order to deal with impurity. The early church, on the other hand, later understood it more in terms of an act of *devotio* against an external threat such as the power of evil.

DeMaris has done an excellent job of raising the profile of ritual awareness as a useful tool in biblical studies and demonstrating new and constructive ways by which it might be explored. It is to be commended that he has done this in a very readable package. Individual scholars will differ as to the accuracy of DeMaris’s interpretations in the various chapters. As a small example, one may question the distinction DeMaris makes in the “Paul’s Omphalos” chapter between ethical and purity concerns when ethics might instead be argued to be an important component of essential purity concerns.

Another more pervasive ground for debate is the common assumption that NT Scripture is simply a human construction. On the whole, however, DeMaris's original assertion that "ritual is central to, and definitive for, early Christian life" has received an excellent defense.

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TERESA REEVE

Gorman, Michael J. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*, revised and expanded. Peabody: Hendrikson, 2009. 286 pp. Paperback, \$19.95.

Michael J. Gorman teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary and St. Mary's Seminary and University. He considers Bruce Manning Metzger to be his mentor; in fact, the book is dedicated to his memory. The current work is a revision of *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (2001), which is itself a revision of *Texts and Contexts* (1994, 1998). In essence, the current work is the fourth revision of the author's original publication. In 2005, Hendrikson published a companion volume, *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation*, which is the work of fifteen Protestant (including the author) and Catholic scholars, all of whom are faculty members of the Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore.

Elements of Biblical Exegesis is founded on the notion that the task of exegesis is the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis of the biblical text. As a result, the author prefers to focus on the methodology of the synchronic approach, which deals mainly with the final form of the biblical text. He believes that exegetes of all levels primarily meet the text as it stands in the biblical canon rather than engage or interact with the original source or the development stage of the text. The *synchronic approach* is not concerned with oral traditions or hypothetical sources; rather, it analyzes the text in relation to the context or worldview in which it first appeared. In his opinion, for a book that is concerned with the elements of exegesis, this methodology is better suited to achieve his goal. Whereas he does not invalidate the value of the *diachronic approach* (historical-critical method) that deals mainly with the formation of the text, he devotes limited attention to this methodology because it requires technical historical and linguistics skills that not all readers possess (23). Perhaps the most revealing reason he notes for avoiding the diachronic approach is the fact that in recent years this methodology has come under critical questioning as a viable tool for biblical exegesis. Another approach to biblical exegesis is the *existential approach* that focuses primarily on a fundamental spiritual encounter with God through meditation on the text, an instrumental approach that is also known as *theological* or *transformative*. The author also limits the use of this approach because it requires sophisticated theological perspectives not readily available