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Book Review: Personal Speech-Ethics in the Epistle of James

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own text as expressing unconscious conflicts and longings within his psyche? An interview with L., published in *Evangelisches Kommentar* (Oct. 1995, 605–8) provides further material for any critic who wishes to raise hypotheses about L.'s unconscious.

The long central chapter that analyses New Testament Resurrection texts contains many insightful comments and valuable criticisms. The problem is that L.'s exegesis aims to prop up a very flawed thesis about the origins of Christianity. John Bowden's translation is, as usual, simply magnificent. It is regrettable that this talent serves a book that many scholars, not least L.'s own Protestant colleagues at the University of Göttingen, find outrageously deficient.

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GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J.

PERSONAL SPEECH-ETHICS IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES. By William R. Baker. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995. Pp. xvi + 364. DM 124.

A revision of a thesis originally presented at King's College, University of Aberdeen. Baker's intent seems to have been to go beyond the level of "introductory topics" (authorship, date, provenance, etc.) to a point of engaging "the content and actual thought" of the document traditionally referred to as the Epistle of James. The reason very few interpreters have taken steps beyond the "introductory topics" is clear: the history of research on this document reflects little consensus and much befuddlement among scholars about how to assess it and where to place it in the history of the rhetoric and diversification of early Christianity. B. is among the few who claim to have found an interpretive angle, viz. a specific theme whereby the document can be interpreted.

The theme B. thinks can explain the document—because it can be argued to be a "primary concern," registered in different ways throughout—is what he terms "personal speech-ethics." He admits that this is not a technical term used in James or any other ancient document, it is a term B. uses in order to signify the "idea or ethics of morality as applied to interpersonal communication . . . the rights and wrongs of utterance . . . when to speak, how to speak, and to whom to speak, as well as when, how, and to whom not to speak" (2).

The personal speech-ethics theme is so prevalent in James that it provides the fivefold schema B. uses in order to interpret James as well as a diverse group of writings in other "ancient Mediterranean" literatures. The rudiments of speech ethics (James 1:19–27), the evil of the tongue (3:1–12; 4:1–2b), speech in "inter-human" relationships (3:18; 4:1–2b, 11–12; 5:9), speech in human-divine relationships (4:2c–10, 13–17; 5:13–18; 1:5–8), and the relationship of speech to truth (5:12)—these constitute the basic subtheme divisions whereby the epistle registers the "personal speech-ethics."

Although the basic theme is in evidence throughout the ancient

Mediterranean documents and cultures, the latter are basically relegated in the book to "background" status. So the five major parts of B.'s book correspond to the five thematic divisions. And each part includes two chapters, the first of which takes up one of the five thematic divisions by discussing the "background" material (Near Eastern wisdom literature, the Old Testament, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Rabbinic literature, Philo, the New Testament) and the second of which takes up the same subtheme in exegetical treatment in the pertinent pericopes in James.

The book's importance and its strength lies in clearly establishing the pervasiveness of what is termed "personal speech-ethics" in the epistle of James and in other literatures. Through rather thorough exegetical analysis B. makes a strong case for the theme, as he defines it, as a significant rhetorical thread that can go a long way toward explaining the epistle. Yet in limiting the scope of the analysis to the formal and substantive significations of the theme in James, and in relegating all other material to the status of "background," B. created a circular argument and a theoretically flat analysis that ultimately renders his book much less the breakthrough it seemed to promise. Since the Epistle of James has never afforded the interpreter a clear window onto the social dynamics behind it, and since B. bases his analysis of the theme only upon James as text-base, the reader will doubtless be left wondering what the issues behind the issue of "personal speech-ethics" really are. Given the circular structure and curious presuppositions of the book, it is not clear how such issues could be determined.

This thesis turned book, although in general clearly written, is spotted with misspellings and infelicitous expressions; it required much more extensive and careful editing. Yet it deserves a wide and critical readership because it is a provocative treatment of an elusive and fascinating New Testament document and topic.

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BASIL OF CAESAREA. By Philip Rousseau. *Transformation of the Classical Heritage.* Berkeley: University of California, 1995. Pp. xix + 412. \$55.

Does one do full justice to Basil of Caesarea (330–379), when one identifies him exclusively as an opponent of heresy and promoter of monastic life? According to Rousseau there has been an overemphasis on these two facets in many studies devoted to Basil. He thinks one should also pay close attention to Basil's position as the bishop of a provincial metropolis, to the wealth and status of his family, and the profound learning and verbal eloquence fostered by his own classical education. In spite of its title, R.'s book is not a full-scale biography. Its scope is more limited, aimed at answering the following questions: why and how Basil became bishop, how he defined his task, and how