

Spring 2002

Review: 'Jesus in Solidarity with His People: A Theologian Looks at Mark'

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Doyle, Dennis M. (Dennis Michael), "Review: 'Jesus in Solidarity with His People: A Theologian Looks at Mark'" (2002). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. 14.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/14

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The book offers a wealth of material. It has a broad range of references, yet is judicious and well-balanced. It would serve best as a reference work in a course but would be difficult to teach as a text. Indeed, the authors advocate a flexible reading to make "such a comprehensive work" "more accessible in parts" (*Preface*). The table of contents is highly detailed and allows one to access the book in multiple ways. Every library should have a copy. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in the social history of the Jesus movement in the first century.

Gonzaga University

MICHAEL L. COOK, S.J.

Jesus in Solidarity with His People: A Theologian Looks at Mark. By William Reiser, S.J. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000. xvii + 233 pages. \$19.95 (paper).

Reiser offers a text that blends skillfully theology, biblical studies, and spirituality. Classroom teaching and retreat preaching form the backdrop to the work. Each chapter explores a topic of academic and pastoral interest, such as calling, forgiveness, the will of God, the kingdom, suffering, prophecy, trust, secrecy. Permeating all of the chapters, however, are common themes close to the author's heart, the most central of which is expressed in the book's apt title.

On one level this text attempts an historical image of Jesus from a liberationist perspective. To say only that would be very misleading, however, for simultaneously on another level the text engages traditional doctrinal and pastoral concerns. Reiser's central argument is that an appreciation of the radical social and political dimensions of the Jesus of Mark's gospel can lead to key insights as to how the Christian tradition should be understood and lived.

Reiser's theological opponent is anyone who would promote purely transcendental and idealistic images of Jesus that cover over the original social and political underpinnings of Mark's gospel. The kingdom preached by Jesus included the "throwaways," and Jesus was the most thrown away of all. Reiser holds it to be of utmost importance to see the connection between the crucified Jesus and the many others in history who have experienced, whether literally or metaphorically, crucifixion.

Reiser struggles throughout the text to hold historical contingency and divine providence in fruitful tension. His strongest arguments, however, are aimed at those who emphasize providence to the neglect of history. Understood historically, Jesus' sinlessness might best be understood as an "orientation." Jesus becomes fully the Son of God only at the moment of the resurrection. Early titles of Jesus are metaphorical descriptions, not metaphysical explanations. God does not, then or now, suspend or circumvent the physical laws of creation. Reiser wants his readers to grasp imaginatively the history, however elusive, that underlay later doctrinal formulations. His aim is not to subvert such later formulations but to interpret them in the light of scriptural and historical insights. He hopes his readers will see that following Jesus today entails taking the side of victims in the ongoing struggle for peace and justice. Reiser demonstrates that radical social concern, understood properly, is not at

odds with pastoral attention to spirituality, but is a key that opens up its meaning.

This book belongs in every library intent upon having a strong collection in Catholic theology, biblical studies, and spirituality. That it crosses several sub-disciplines makes it unlikely to be the primary text in a course, but it can serve as a useful reading in a wide variety of courses. It is engaging and thought-provoking, blending well theology and spiritual insight with social concern.

University of Dayton

DENNIS M. DOYLE

Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms. By Thomas F. Ryan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000. ix + 233 pages. \$40.00.

The return of Thomas Aquinas to college and university classrooms requires that the reception of his texts be as full and as authentic as possible. We know much about the impoverished reception of his writings at the end of the middle ages and during the Renaissance, and perhaps we know even more about the limitations of the neo-Thomism of the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. However, the task now is not to dwell on these deficiencies of interpretation but to retrieve the texts of this doctor of the church with a full appreciation of the world behind his texts and the world of his texts so that readers will be able to understand the world ahead of Aquinas' texts.

One failure of the past has been the lack, nearly from his own century, of an appreciation of the biblical foundation of all the teaching and writing of Brother Thomas of the Order of Preachers. His *licentia docendi ubique* (magisterial license to teach everywhere) bestowed on him the title *Magister in Sacra Pagina*. Thomas was, before all else, always and everywhere, a teacher of the Bible. Studies like Thomas Ryan's are a significant advance in the recognition of the biblical character of Aquinas' oeuvre.

Thomas' commentary on the Psalms was left unfinished after Psalm 54 when he discontinued all his writing in December of 1273. Ryan follows the respected argument that Thomas composed this commentary on the Psalms as he concluded his writing career. Significantly Aquinas taught the Psalms at the time he was composing the christological treatise in Part Three of his *Summa theologiae*. Ryan laudably uses this connection as a way of exploring the christological nature of the Psalms. He also creatively turns to the key concepts of exemplarism and *exemplum* to investigate not only the Christology of the Psalms but "Christ's Example of Prayer in *Super Psalmos*" (Chapter Four).

One is tempted to ask the author of this fine study of Aquinas' *On the Psalms* to publish a translation of *Super Psalmos*. However, that commentary on the Psalms is a *reportatio*, albeit by Thomas' able companion Reginald of Piperno. A *reportatio* is only a bare bones rendition of what Thomas said in the classroom as he taught/read (*legere*) the Psalms to young Dominican students at Naples. Ryan's fine dissertation turned into an exemplary book would have lost its readers in endless detail had he not chosen such creative ways of exploring *Super Psalmos*. Ryan has also demonstrated a way out of the dilemma of a seemingly narrow notion by Thomas of prayer as petition.