



**The Gospels Today: Challenging Readings of John, Mark, Luke and Matthew**, Stephen W. Need, Cowley Publications, 2007 (ISBN 978-1-56101-297-8), 128 pp., pb \$15.95

**Paul Today: Challenging Readings of Acts and the Epistles**, Stephen W. Need, Cowley Publications, 2007 (ISBN 978-1-56101-296-1), 144 pp., pb \$15.95

Stephen Need, the Dean of St. George's College, the Anglican presence in Jerusalem, has written two books, designed to be instructive, sensible introductions to the main writings of the New Testament. Their stand point is that of main stream present day scholarship and the Author hopes to present its findings helpfully and calmly to a wide audience. There is nothing strident or sensational here, rather quiet, clear, informative reasoning. Each book contains a set of essays, discussing major issues or typical subjects of the writings concerned. Volume 1 is Paul Today and among the range of subjects discussed are Christology, Ethics and Ecclesiology; Original Sin; A Theology of Righteousness in Paul; Paul and Women; Food, Conscience and the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians and Marriage and Slavery in 1 Corinthians. Throughout, Need debates and refrains familiar interpretations of Paul through challenge and critique. His reading of the Bible is informed by pastoral experience.

In the Gospels Today, there is a same approach. There are essays on the prologue to the Gospels of John, titles of Jesus like Son of God and Son of Man, and episodes in the Gospel such as The Transfiguration and The Stilling of the Storm. One essay bravely tackles that most puzzling of parables, The Unjust Steward in Luke 16.

The books succeed in offering an overview of some of the issues that arise out of reading a text or theme from Paul or the Gospels. Need demonstrates that in order to read the Bible a working knowledge of what is at stake in trying to understand or interpret a particular text is necessary. The chapters build up to show how there are different ways of approaching New Testament texts and issues. In other words, we need some understanding of how history and context have shaped the text and our reading of it. Need demands that the text is treated with both care and intelligence. He uses language, history, place, archaeology, and other patristic readings of the text in an interdisciplinary approach to interpretation.

The author's skill and enthusiasm find expression in these chapters. Here is a teacher who stimulates the reader to further thought and study. Any reader will be left wanting to know and learn more.

In conclusion, these books are to be commended for their clarity, scholarship, and earthed good sense. I shall certainly be putting them to use for those members of my Parish who want to engage in serious biblical study. All of us, from whatever perspective, would do well to learn from the way Need reads the Bible.

James Woodward  
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**The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims**, F. E. Peters, Princeton University Press, 2007 (ISBN-10: 0-691-13112-0), 292 pp., hb \$29.95

'This book is about the antecedents and consequences of the claims of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims to be in possession of the Word of God' (p. 1). This book studies the ways adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths identified and listened to the voice of God. It also studies how God's words were recorded, collected, arranged, and preserved in their sacred books – the Bible (Peters' designation for the Jewish Old Testament), the New Testament (Peters' designation of the Christian Bible), and the Quran (the book Muslims believe God revealed to Muhammad).

Christians might wonder at Peters' designation of the New Testament as the Christian scripture rather than (in their view) the whole Bible – the Old and New Testaments. For Peters, the Old Testament is a different (Christian) version of the Hebrew/Jewish Bible. Peters' designation flows from the fact that the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Bible) was for many years used as the Christian Old Testament – and it contains books not found in the Jewish (Hebrew) Bible. Even the Protestant version of the Old Testament which excludes those apocryphal books is arranged differently than the Bible: thus the distinction between the Bible and the Christian Old Testament.

This book is not a comparison of the teachings of the three Abrahamic faiths (Islam, Judaism, Christianity). Rather, it is an historical critical study of how the scriptures of these three faiths moved from oral into written form. This study of that transition finds answers that are tentative because of the thinness of the evidence available to a secular historian. At times, conclusions are speculative and conjectural due to the lack of hard evidence. Thus, some adherents of these three faiths will disagree with certain portions of this book.