Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology

Volume 5
Number 2 Spirit-empowered Leadership

2020

Reviews

Spiritus Journal
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Writing from a Wesleyan perspective, Marcus Kilian presents an eclectic model of leadership development that he describes as formational leadership. Designed to help toxic Christian leaders grow, *Formational Leadership* integrates concepts from various disciplines within the behavioral sciences such as Bowen Family Systems theory and Attachment theory, as well as the competencies of emotional and social intelligence, to provide a relational and developmental approach to forming leaders. He defines toxic leadership as the abuse of power that results in direct harm to followers and traces this toxicity to traits characteristic of certain personality disorders, especially narcissism and perfectionism. These traits are reflected in thought patterns dominated by pride, anger, and greed, and are expressed in behaviors such as manipulation, micromanagement, verbal aggression, and neglect of emotional needs.

Since narcissistic and perfectionist persons tend to seek positions of influence, they often end up in leadership roles. Narcissistic leaders face challenges in the areas of empathy, denial, rationalization, and compartmentalization, while perfectionistic leaders tend to have little awareness of feelings, have an identity based on performance, and lack compassion for self and others. Both tend to pressure followers into overemphasizing ministry to the point where it creates an unhealthy work-life imbalance. In contrast, Kilian’s model of formational leadership is informed by Wesleyan notions of Christian virtues and affections, which are assumed to emerge in leaders who cooperate with the Spirit’s sanctifying activity. The goal of his model is to produce effective leaders who exhibit spiritual and emotional maturity, especially during stressful situations, by practicing self-awareness and self-management informed by the qualities of humility, gratitude, and compassion.

Kilian organizes his formational model around three theological categories—orthokardia (right heart), orthodynamis (right power), and orthopraxis (right practices). Into these he integrates various psychological constructs in an attempt to demonstrate how emotional and spiritual maturity can be promoted in toxic leaders.
In a manner consistent with Scazzero’s premise that it is impossible to become spiritually mature without also being emotionally mature (Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, 2006), Kilian emphasizes orthokardia and describes it in terms of Wesley’s concept of entire sanctification. Having a right heart is the result of the Spirit’s sanctifying work that enables believers increasingly to love God, others, creation, and self with pure motives. This process is facilitated in part through the progression of self-differentiation, a concept Kilian borrows from Bowen Family Systems theory. In differentiating a self, persons assume increased responsibility for working out their values and defining themselves accordingly within their relational contexts, while also seeking to stay connected to others, even those who differ. Achieving this differentiated balance requires the emotional maturity to say “I” when everyone else is saying “we” and to resist the urge either to impose one’s will by demanding adherence or to compromise one’s integrity by passively complying. Maintaining such a stance necessitates secure relationship attachments, especially with God. In discussing Bowlby’s Attachment theory, Kilian emphasizes that the extent to which leaders feel secure within themselves determines their ability to set appropriate boundaries, provide helpful feedback, and act compassionately. In other words, secure leaders have the capacity to be respectful and affirming of differences rather than critical or defensive, as if those who differ are rejecting or invalidating them.

Under the category of orthodynamis, Kilian borrows from virtue ethics and the Wesleyan concept of religious affections to discuss the importance of having right motives in the use of power. He equates right motives with the qualities of humility, gratitude, and compassion, which he selects because they serve as the antidotes to the personality-disordered traits associated with narcissistic and obsessive-compulsive leaders. Humility is the opposite of narcissistic pride, gratitude the opposite of obsessive-compulsive greed, and compassion the antidote to patterns of anger, impatience, and aggression, which often characterize a toxic leadership style. To develop these virtues, Kilian recommends regularly practicing the spiritual disciplines, especially solitude, simplicity, and service, while emphasizing that mature leaders seek to empower others rather than exert power over them.

In addressing orthopraxis, Kilian discusses the Wesleyan concepts of social holiness and justice in the context of postmodern culture. He views Wesley’s focus on community as consistent with postmodernism’s emphasis on social context by calling attention to the social ethics of Wesleyan spirituality that prioritize showing mercy, acting justly, and living in mutual accountability. A mature leader’s responsibility to act rightly involves courageously addressing the social and political issues of the day in a manner that mirrors God’s passion for justice. Kilian asserts that organizational
cultures that are based on social holiness and justice will embrace diversity, encourage minority leadership, serve the needs of its community, and practice hospitality and inclusion. In other words, such organizations will reflect the (counter) culture of the Kingdom of God.

Kilian compares his formational approach to other models of leadership such as Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee’s primal leadership model expressed in *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (2002). It exemplifies emotionally and socially intelligent leadership through the model’s integration of the concepts of differentiation, secure attachment, and emotional maturity that Kilian espouses. He also views Sashkin and Sashkin’s approach to transformational leadership (*Leadership That Matters: The Critical Factors for Making a Difference in People’s Lives and Organizations’ Success*, 2003) and George’s model of authentic leadership (*Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, 2007) as related through their compatibility with Christian values. In exploring their implications for leadership development, Kilian emphasizes several distinctive outcomes by noting that organizations in which these models of leadership are practiced create cultures where the ethnocentric tendency toward ethnic pride and superiority are replaced by humility and equality; the tendency toward entitlement and white privilege is transformed to reflect gratitude and inclusion; and the tendency toward control and rigidity is replaced by compassion and servanthood.

In addressing toxic leadership, Kilian has identified an important issue under which Christian organizations often chafe. His work is well-researched and thoughtfully organized. Each of his core chapters is outlined to discuss the relevant concepts first, followed by their implication for leadership development, and concluded with a reflection section in which questions and exercises provide for further discussion and exploration. But he may have attempted to include too much information in each chapter. Developing an eclectic model requires explaining a lot: each of the integrating constructs and the relevance of each to the model, quite a job for the author. As a result, the reading becomes a little dense at times, when he describes and then applies the array of concepts.

One challenge to Kilian’s aim of forming leaders is that of recruiting toxic leaders into the process he describes. He acknowledges that narcissistic and obsessive-compulsive leaders tend to resist help and suggests that the organizations in which they hold leadership positions need strong boards who can hold them accountable. While this structure sounds helpful and can be effective when in place, such arrangements seem to be more the exception than the rule. Since toxic leaders typically do not receive constructive feedback, especially when it requires them to
look honestly at their own attitudes and actions, they often keep primary authority and create boards who merely appear to hold them accountable. To suggest to such leaders that they would benefit from embracing such a formative process generally triggers their resistance, because it implies they need to grow in certain areas, a need they are reluctant to acknowledge. The grim reality is that if toxic leaders end up in a formative process it is generally only after they have hit bottom, which means that they have crashed and burned and often taken others down with them. While in such instances Kilian’s model would be helpful in restoring such leaders, it may better serve to prevent such failures. If leaders were formed with his approach early in their careers, they and those they lead might be saved from disaster.

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Rick Wadholm, Jr.’s *A Theology of the Spirit in the Former Prophets: A Pentecostal Perspective* is his doctoral dissertation published for a wider audience. Prepared under the direction of John Christopher Thomas and Leroy Martin at The Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN, it was written for both professors and ministers who want more information about the “Spirit passages” in the Former Prophets. As opposed to the Latter Prophets (the biblical prophets, Isaiah–Malachi), the Former Prophets (FP) include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and, taken together, preserve the history of ancient Israel written from a prophetic perspective for subsequent generations.

In short order, chapter one (“A History of Interpretation”) demonstrates that previous scholarly work afford the Spirit passages in the FP only passing consideration as it focused on other pressing matters in the text. Little if anything substantive is said regarding the Spirit’s work in the ongoing narrative. The lacuna is surprising; even recent works like IVP’s *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (2005) does not contain an entry on “Spirit.” The copious data amassed by Wadholm in this chapter make one thing very clear: this portion of the Bible needs
more informed study from those who are concerned with “matters of the Spirit.” Wadholm’s text is an initial step in addressing this need.

Chapter two presents a thorough review of 125 years of scholarship on Spirit passages in the FP. Beginning with Gunkel (1888), and including Wood (1904), Scheepers (1960), Neve (1972), Montague (1976), and Horton (1976, 2005), to list a few, Wadholm summarizes the differences between the older “Historical Quest for the Spirit in the Former Prophets” and the “Theological Quest for the Spirit in the Former Prophets.” Wadholm observes that both trajectories scan for the Spirit as somehow outside or behind the biblical narratives and suggests that the time has come for Bible readers to stop looking elsewhere for the Spirit in the FP and attend to the passages where the Spirit is undoubtedly central to the narrative (43).

Wadholm’s hermeneutic is clear throughout the book: he offers readers a close analysis of the text or “hearing” the text (following Lee Roy Martin’s *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* [2008]). Recognizing that Pentecostal hermeneutics is in the developmental stages (cf. 202), Wadholm orders his study around three foci: (1) a close literary analysis of biblical texts, (2) a cacophony of interpretive approaches, and (3) the transformative experience of engaging the text (61). Since original biblical characters were transformed (or otherwise, when they resisted change), so too, subsequent readers may experience something similar as they read the Historical Books.

Although scholars, for the most part, have given FP Spirit passages only cursory reviews, early Pentecostals frequently were attracted to these passages as they tried to comprehend and express their perspectives of the new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. During those early post-Azuza Street Meetings, in which crowds of people began to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit for the first time, hundreds of journal articles and newsletters were produced that were essential in the development of nascent Pentecostal Christianity (66). In chapter four, “History of Effects . . . ,” Wadholm surveys nine periodicals that discuss the Spirit in the FP and other major biblical texts mentioned below (67). Together they offer a window, as it were, into early Pentecostal reflection at its earliest developmental stages. It was a populist hermeneutic fueled by literalist readings of the text and Spirit-inspired interpretation (47), and Wadholm’s *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach (“History of Effects”; a modification of Reception History that emphasizes the history of textual influences on later readers) is well-suited to collect and examine these FP Spirit references in early Pentecostal literature. It is the longest chapter in the book and is an engaging read, full of the raw, life-changing inspiration overflowing at the time.
could hardly put it down. It allows readers to “venture inside” the earliest shapers of American Pentecostalism, to see what challenged them, disturbed them, or gave them great joy. This movement and its earliest hermeneuts formed part of the foundation for the phenomenal, worldwide growth of Pentecostalism, and is well worth reading.

Chapters four through seven attempt a close literary and theological examination of the Spirit passages in the FP. Of the forty-four or so occurrences of רוח (S/spirit) in the FP, Wadholm focuses on the twenty where the רוח engages the people of Israel. (Passages where רוח appears in meteorological, anthropological, or attitudinal contexts are not covered in this study.) Chapter four covers Spirit passages in Judges, chapter five examines Saul and David, chapter six addresses Micaiah, and chapter seven focuses on Elijah and Elisha. The final chapters offer a constructive Pentecostal theology of the FP and a discussion of possible future research.

Although Wadholm gives a great deal of space to his earlier chapters, chapters four through seven comprise the core of the book; it is here that he offers a much-needed focus on the Spirit passages in the FP. For example, not everything in the Spirit passages is encouraging, and perhaps the most troublesome is the story of the Prophet, Micaiah ben Imlah, in 1 Kings 22 in which the Lord sent a “lying (or deceiving) Spirit” to the court of Ahab. It is an odd story and has proven troublesome for many Bible readers. Just as early Pentecostals utilized this text variously, so too, scholars have differing opinions regarding what actually happened. In this context, Wadholm calls for careful discernment regarding any message from God, past or present; careful interpretation is essential. These four chapters offer a wealth of nuanced biblical interpretation—a must read for anyone who wants to address the Spirit passages in the FP.

Wadholm’s book is well-documented with extensive footnotes and bibliography, and includes biblical reference and author indices. It is unfortunate that there is little to no engagement with Jewish or majority-world scholarship in his text. Moreover, although Wadholm chose a Jewish biblical division name in his book title, it is curious that he overlooks centuries of Jewish practice and vocalizes the tetragram. Why ignore this ancient practice? Additionally, as the book drew to a close, I expected Wadholm to bring chapter three and its massive quantity of populist biblical interpretation into dialogue with his exegesis of Spirit passages in chapters 4–7. This never happened, and I was left wondering why. Perhaps this was out of respect for the earliest leaders of the Pentecostal movement who, as non-biblicists, were working with the tools they had to read and apply what they read in

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their Bibles and experienced in the early days of the Pentecostal renewal. Whatever the reason, Wadholm’s book left me wanting more. A follow-up volume would be welcomed by those who appreciate his fresh examination of the Former Prophets.

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Among thousands of leadership studies, including hundreds expressing a Christian view, Bobby Clinton’s The Making of a Leader stands in a class of its own. It established a new theory of ministry formation, one marked by leadership processes, patterns, and principles known as LET, or “Leadership Emergence Theory.”

Clinton defines a ministry leader biblically as a person with a God-given capacity and responsibility to influence a specific group of God’s people toward his purposes for them (213). The leader develops through a lifetime of learning from critical incidents on which the leader reflects and through which God teaches them something important (25). Central to Clinton’s theory are the concepts of phases, processes, and principles.

Phases of Emergence

Phases are patterns or defined seasons of influence across leaders’ lifespans. When mapped on a timeline, phases help them see how God is working in and using them to influence others. In his 2009 Strategic Concepts That Clarify a Focused Life, Clinton simplifies the phases into four, with smaller sub-phases (9).
Clinton emphasizes that in Phases 1 and 2, God’s primary work is in the leader’s inner life, in contrast to Phases 3 and 4, during which God is working primarily through a leader’s life. In Phase 3, lasting perhaps two or three decades, leaders move from general to focused ministry, for which they draw upon their lives and gifts to establish ministries built upon discernment and competency. Finally, during Phase 4, God moves leaders into various roles that match their gift-mix, experience, and temperament, and they exercise spiritual authority beyond their own organizations, through thought and network leadership, and shape succeeding generations.

**Process Items**

One of the strengths of Clinton’s model is his identifying “process items” God uses to develop leaders. Process items refer to providential events, people, problems, and pressures God uses to develop a person’s inner calling to a ministry responsibility. Clinton names three process items God uses in the General Ministry Phase of emerging leaders to develop their characters: integrity checks, obedience checks, and word checks.

As a youth in training in King Nebuchadnezzar’s court, Daniel faced an “integrity check” when told to eat Babylonian food. He stayed faithful to his inner convictions. He kept a kosher diet, and God honored his unyielding character with a promotion in the king’s service.

Abraham experienced an “obedience check” when he heard and obeyed God’s voice in sacrificing Isaac. God rewarded Abraham’s obedience by sparing Isaac and otherwise blessing Abraham (Making 63). Clinton claims obedience to the voice of God is learned as part of our character, before it can be taught (66).

Leaders experience the “word check” when their leadership includes clarifying a scriptural truth that influences others. Clinton sees this process item as expressing Pauline “word gifts,” such as teaching, prophecy, and exhortation, and using the study of Scripture to feed leaders’ own souls, as well as helping others (66).

In addition to such process items that relate emerging leaders to God, Clinton identifies ministry-maturing process items that clarify and redefine one’s relationship to others. These include ministry tasks, divine contacts, isolation, conflict, organizational pressures, spiritual authority, instances of divine power, and divine affirmation. Paul’s relationship to Barnabas illustrates many of these:
from his isolation to discovery by mentor Barnabas and their ministry together, expressed with divine power but ending with conflict (104).

**Principles to Live by**

Finally, Clinton’s work guides mature leaders to develop a ministry philosophy to maximize their effectiveness. Clinton articulates principles by which he has operated, including these: ministry flows from character, the nature of ministry is service to others, effective ministry will require sacrifice, Jesus is the supreme model for ministry, and ministry must be empowered by the Holy Spirit (193).

The fitness of Clinton’s theory for Spirit-empowered leaders arises from four reasons: Leadership Emergence Theory . . .

1. is an authentic qualitative Christian research framework within which leaders may reflect on their personal development with full embrace of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit;
2. is easy to understand, given Clinton came from the Deeper Life or Holiness tradition, from which the Pentecostal movement emerged;
3. is scalable; it can be learned through simple practices, such as creating a personal timeline with post-it notes, and deeper study of biblical, historical, and contemporary leaders; and

Clinton’s body of work helps emerging leaders understand the spiritual, relational, and situational dynamics at play in their personal and professional development. As the Spirit-empowered Movement seeks to shape its own identity, practice, and influence in the twenty-first century, it will benefit from integrating “leadership emergence” into its educational and ecclesial life.

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Those most knowledgeable of New Testament studies are already keenly aware of the important contributions of Craig Keener. One expects focus on lively, relevant subject matter, exhaustive research, weighty analysis of varying viewpoints, and measured, balanced conclusions. Keener’s Christobiography evinces all these scholarly strengths and more. The burgeoning of background studies of the New Testament in recent decades finds Keener at the forefront in terms of wide, virtually exhaustive, reading of this ancient literature and evidence. In this volume, Keener explores what can reasonably be expected of the Gospels in terms of their historical and biographical value.

As massive as his presentation is, its actual purpose and focus is surprisingly narrow. He does not produce his own constructive portrayal of the historical Jesus (see his The Historical Jesus of the Gospels [more than 800 pages] for more on this concern). He does not mount a rousing defense of the historical reliability of the New Testament (although there is much in this volume that would contribute toward that end). Rather, Keener attempts to evaluate the more modest, albeit foundational, issue of the appropriate approach to ascertaining the Jesus of history and scripture. He aims to “contribute to the epistemology of historical-Jesus research” (20). His findings in this regard are groundbreaking and are harbingers of future research.

Keener chose a rather odd title for his text in an attempt to encapsulate its basic thrust (1). He wanted to emphasize the insight that the Gospels are ancient biographies. Further, he proceeded actually to immerse himself in that literature, which few have even attempted, to determine whether this viewpoint is true and to ascertain precisely what insights can be drawn from it. In the final analysis, Keener seeks to determine whether the four Gospels, as we have them, merit the status of the primary sources for access to the historical Jesus. Thus, the subtitle of the volume, “Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels,” carries the more moderate intention of determining whether these writings are serviceable as primary sources rather than a tour de force defense of their infallible historical precision. The function of the Gospels, more than their content, is in purview here.
At the same time, the issue of reliability cannot be skirted since the ultimate goal for Jesus studies is a reliable historical portrait.

Keener places himself to the right of center among noted Jesus scholars, alongside N. T. Wright. He sees scholars such as E. P. Sanders, Gerd Theissen, John Meier, and Mark Allan Powell as centrists, with someone like John Dominic Crossan being left of center. All are basically “on the same map” in terms of the broad-stroke depiction of Jesus in the Gospels, but because of different assumptions and methods would differ on the details (8). Keener modestly concludes that we can derive substantive historical knowledge of Jesus from the Gospels, while at the same time acknowledging that all historical knowledge carries with it a degree of relativity.

But what precisely are the Gospels? The question itself bears a part of the answer: They are Gospels, accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry, generally couched in Jewish categories, announcing important news to humankind. Nevertheless, they have come down to us as bioi, in the form of ancient biographies with distinctive features. Perhaps modern New Testament scholars had to rediscover this truth because they tended to think in modern rather than ancient categories. Modern biographies differ widely from the Gospels. One will find no documentation in the Gospels with precise chronology and so forth. Ancient biographies were more precise about beginnings and endings in the lives of their subjects, but the life stories themselves were only in approximate chronological order and were arranged to reveal character traits and illustrate moral issues. “Ancient biographers and historians viewed historical intentions as fully compatible with edifying agendas” (37). Thus, Keener’s first task is one of placing the Gospels historically in their precise literary domain.

In this beginning section of the book, Keener provides perhaps the most extensive exploration of the relevant ancient literature ever attempted. In effect, he asks what ancient readers themselves expected of such literature and then follows with what we should expect. It is his extensive presentation of examples of ancient biographies that enables the reader better to place the Gospels themselves. The type of literature determines the method of interpretation; thus, grasping more precisely what we can expect the Gospels to provide, and in what form, goes a long way toward a thorough apprehension (and appropriation!) of their message. In the case of Jesus as a sage and public figure, ancient readers would expect reliable historical accounts, yet with some allowance for literary license (although extremes in this regard were eschewed). Neither was precise historical chronology expected. In the case of the Gospels, this insight helps immensely in terms of attempts at
harmonizing the Gospels. Keener’s examples from the Gospels themselves, distributed here and there, are quite illuminating (see 123, with analysis of several synoptic variances).

With regard to the historical information put forward in ancient biographies and in the gospel narratives, Keener evaluates the relevant literature, asking what would have been expected in that day. He uses helpfully Luke’s writings as an example, while coming to careful conclusions on the nature of the history displayed in the Gospels. Biographers and historians in the early Roman period would have been expected to be solidly grounded in the sources. At the same time, allowance was made for the rhetorical use of this information in the development of an engaging narrative. The Gospels evince these same characteristics, providing historical fact, not merely literary fiction. Although ancient writers were less inhibited in their sympathetic portrayal of their subjects than modern writers would be, they would at the same time attempt to ground their presentations on historical fact. Being focused on a singular subject, biography might be considered a more popular genre than history, but fidelity to sources was still highly valued. Finally, in this section, attention should be drawn to Keener’s masterful depiction of Luke’s historical and literary methods; few have as comprehensive a grasp of this subject matter.

Next Keener tackles the question of the range of deviation to be found in ancient biographies and histories, exploring their faithfulness to prior sources and their literary flexibility. One interesting exercise he includes is a comparison, in parallel form, of the accounts of the brief Roman emperor Otho found in Suetonius, Plutarch, and Tacitus. As one would expect, there are differences as well as similarities, with a certain range of flexibility. Their reading audiences would not expect absolute precision in terms of chronology, verbatim speeches, and minor points, but could still be confident that they were being given access to actual events. Then Keener draws the parallel to the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus. He tweaks the anachronism of modern scholars’ nitpicking the gospel narratives, expecting absolute precision, pointing out that, given this inadequate approach, no ancient documents could be considered historically reliable or serviceable (nor modern history or biography, for that matter!). One has to allow for a certain range of flexibility. Matthew and Luke, for example, would be found on the more conservative side (at least in their use of Mark), while John would be found on the more flexible side. Finally, he concludes that the “flex room” one encounters in the Gospels is comparable to their ancient counterparts (biographical and historical...
materials), maintaining fidelity to the actual events narrated with minor variations in chronology, the combining and editing of materials, and the like.

Two brief chapters follow on objections to the Gospels as historical biographies, couched as the questions: What about miracles? and What about John? Keener explains his brevity on miracles by his having already published more than 1300 pages on the subject, including a section of his four-volume Acts commentary and his monograph on miracles. The mere fact that both the Gospels and the story of the contemporary church (primarily Pentecostal-Charismatic, though he does not mention these massive traditions by name) are replete with eyewitness accounts of miracles prevents one from writing off the authenticity of the Gospels as history and biography.

On the question of John, Keener acknowledges that he basically set aside John in his (Keener’s) *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*. He also defends his brevity on this subject in the present volume by making reference to his 1600-page commentary on John. What he says about John is helpful, concluding that, even with John’s wide flexibility, he still remains within the biography genre. Nevertheless, one could hope that one day Keener will take on the task of integrating all four Gospels more fully, tracing out in more detail what we actually have in John’s nonpareil narrative. Since rhetoric and theology loom larger in John’s presentation, could this prompt us to examine more thoroughly what we mean by the term *Gospel*? Could it be that a gospel (*euangelion*) is a literary genre of its own, albeit couched as *bios*, as James D. G. Dunn has argued? Thus, John could be simply taking greater liberty in announcing the good news of Jesus, including even the ethos of encomium! As Dunn has also argued, a scholar labors in vain to discover a “non-impactful” Jesus in the gospel narratives. In any event, Keener effectively displays both the overlap and the differences between John and the Synoptics, demonstrating that in spite of the liberties John takes, all four Gospels share the same basic genre of ancient biography.

Finally, Keener addresses the issues of memory and oral tradition with relation to the etiology of the Gospels’ production. This is one of the most fascinating and promising sections of the book. First, the author deals with personal or psychological memory. Utilizing insights from the growing body of scholarship in this arena of study as well as personal reflections on his own processes of memory, Keener provides an intriguing analysis of the role and function of memory as the backdrop for historical and biographical writing. The frailties of personal memories, including limitations, biases, suggestibility, chronological displacement, and conflation, must be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the actual events upon which
these memories are generally based, when personally impactful and often rehearsed, can last indefinitely (five-year-old memories, for example, persisting for decades).

In the case of Jesus and his disciples, the role of memory is key. Placed in the ancient Middle Eastern context, the reliability of the accurate transmission of essential content is clearly strengthened. Keener’s discussion here is thorough and helpful. First, the role of eyewitnesses is examined. In terms of the content incorporated into the New Testament documents, both individual and collective recall of events and sayings would play a key role. Jesus was a teacher with disciples, and there is copious material of this practice from this time period. Confidence in oral transmission and remembrance was much higher in these ancient cultures than it would be in our own. Keener’s description of these practices vividly demonstrates this dynamic. Personal memory can often be strengthened by collective memory as well. But the question remains whether oral history and transmission can be seen as serviceable for reliable history.

Keener’s command of the literature on oral tradition is impressive and lends credibility to his conclusions. We have come a long way since the days of Bultmannian form criticism! The study of memory dynamics, both personal and communal, was already becoming available in Bultmann’s day, but unfortunately it would be decades later before a more solidly based analysis of oral tradition would become available. All personal and social memory is fallible, but is also based on actual experiences and events. For communities to preserve their founding traditions, some adaptations and alterations of original memories would be expected. Nonetheless, this process does not preclude the transmission of reliable tradition. Given the relatively close proximity of the writing of the Gospels to the sayings and events that were being transmitted, confidence in the trustworthiness of what was reported is further bolstered. Actual living memory can therefore be seen as partly forming the gospel narratives themselves. Clearly, the Gospels were not novels, but rather faithful reports evincing a solid core and expected variances.

Keener concludes by saying that scholars of both the far left and the far right have essentially committed the same error: “judging the Gospels by standards foreign to their original genre” (497). Steering a middle course, the author sides with those who derive confidence in the memories, traditions, and sources undergirding the New Testament as they continue exploring these majestic texts. Much work remains to be done, Keener would add. For example, source, redaction, and narrative criticism must still be employed to ascertain more precisely the content and dynamics of a given pericope. Scholars should continue to evaluate the sources of variances—be they in the oral transmission process or the result of
redaction, for example. But as James D. G. Dunn echoes in his recommendation of Keener’s volume, “the Gospels compare well with the other biographies of the time as to their historicity, and there is strong historical probability that the Gospel memoirs have preserved the content and character of Jesus’s ministry and teaching.”

Perhaps Keener could combine his previous work on biblical hermeneutics with the results of this present project, in another (probably 700-page) volume, to describe how canonically, theologically, and spiritually the Gospels can and should function in the ongoing life of the church! Given the church’s historical belief in the authority, inspiration, and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, a more complete appropriation of the Bible’s message demands this additional step. But then, hasn’t Keener already done this in his massive commentaries! Profound gratitude for Keener’s faithful scholarly labors is in order.

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