

Item #7

The following item is a book review that was refused publication by Mary Ann Beavis, editor of the New Testament and Intertestamental Literature for *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. The reason for the refusal given to the author of the review was insufficient attention given to the positive aspects to the book under review. The text below is the exact text (two minor changes in punctuation) that was refused. It will be followed by some new observations regarding the book and the refusal.

W. Brian Shelton, Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018). Pp. xiii + 314. Paper \$29.99.

W. Brian Shelton is chief academic officer of Toccoa Falls College in northeast Georgia. According to information on the college website he is a member of the Clarkesville United Methodist Church (mentioned in the “Acknowledgments”, p. ix). In this study he aims “to appeal to evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox alike, seeking neutrality on perspectives of the apostles that place their traditions in conflict” (p. 8).

The study contains an enormous amount of useful information. Each apostle is considered, with relevant information about his individual life as contained in biblical and non-biblical sources. Particularly noteworthy are the “Works Cited” (pp. 281-293) and the

various indices (pp. 295-314) because they make readily available S.'s generally perspicacious presentations of primary and secondary sources.

But to this reviewer there seem to be some flaws in S.'s attempts to seek "neutrality on perspectives of the apostles that place . . . traditions in conflict".

Take, for example, S.'s interpretation of ἀδελφός. He regularly translates it "brother" with reference to the ἀδελφοί of Jesus, thus implying that the mother of Jesus, Mary, was not a virgin. In taking this approach S. ignores the evidence that in New Testament times ἀδελφός can mean "cousin", and the word "brother" today in other languages can mean "cousin" as well. This clearly weakens his discussion of the apostle John at the moment of Jesus' crucifixion: why did Jesus entrust his mother to John if he had brothers (cf. p. 128)?

But much more disconcerting for S.'s claim to be seeking "neutrality on perspectives" is his attribution of "profundity" to the following quotation from Tom Bissel: "Christianity begins with a missing body. Today one of its oldest and most federal expressions bases its legitimacy on the remains of an existing one" (p. 271). Christian legitimacy did not begin with a missing body. It began with a risen body, witnessed to as their principle purpose by twelve of the apostles about whom S. is writing. The Catholic Church is not "one of the . . . oldest" expressions of Christianity. It is *the* oldest, every other

“expression” having detached itself from it. And the Catholic Church does not base its legitimacy on the alleged remains of Peter in the excavations under St. Peter’s Basilica. (During this reviewer’s fifty years’ sojourn in Rome he visited the *scavi* many times and he never once heard a guide refer to said remains as the basis for the Catholic Church’s legitimacy.) The basis for this legitimacy is the granting of the keys of the kingdom by Jesus to Peter and his successors, presented in Scripture, approved by God in the resurrection of Jesus, and transmitted in Tradition.

S.’s discussions often led this reviewer to research-based, faith-filled musing on how the call of the apostles really took place. How their pedestrian every-day lives were unexpectedly and radically changed by a call from a magnetic speaker and fabled wonder-worker who seemed to have God’s blessing and who came from a village in an out-of-the way section of an out-of-the way nook in the Roman Empire. And how their efforts eventually changed that empire in a decisive way. But this reviewer has to admit that his own Roman Catholic research-based, faith-filled background had as much or more to do with his musing than S.’s admittedly capable presentation in many if not all areas.

Musings. Why was the number 12 so important for witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus? (S. ventures no opinion, as far as this reviewer could determine.) Answer: because the twelve apostles symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel; and with their official witness to the resurrection of the Messiah—God’s approval of all that that

Messiah said and did—they brought the Old Dispensation to fulfillment in the New. And where are the wives of the apostles after their call? (S. ventures no opinion, as far as this reviewer could determine.) The apostles were continent after their call to show that the New Dispensation is celibate in a special way: legitimate descent gives way to legitimate Tradition. And after the witness to the approval by God of this radical change by the resurrection of the Messiah, what was the most important element witnessed to? The carrying out by the apostles and their successors of the command of Jesus, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22,19). (S. ventures no opinion, as far as this reviewer could determine.) Thus is *the Church* perpetuated, with celibate priests re-enacting the death and resurrection of a celibate Jesus as cultic ministers of the same Jesus who is priest and victim.

Musing can be useful, even in reviewing competently-written books on Scripture. For traditions involving the apostles cannot always be neutralized as regards “evangelicals, mainline Protestants . . . and Orthodox”. At least so thinks this reviewer.

The reviewer is well aware that many readers do not agree with any of the observations made above, but he does not think they are out of place in a journal with the title *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. He is well aware that objections can be made to such a negative review, but he thinks it is not out of place with regard to a book “seeking neutrality on perspectives of the apostles that place their traditions in conflict” (p. 8). This reviewer wishes that his negative

review be taken as a judgment that S. has failed in his attempt, no matter what the positive aspects of the review may be for a different reader.

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Of the dozens of books I have reviewed for the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* and other journals this is the first time, as far as I can recall, that I have had a review refused. I was book review editor for *Biblica* for many year so I have experienced review-publishing from both sides. Being review editor is not an easy task, and I have great sympathy for Mary Ann Beavis, the review editor who refused to publish my review above. On the other hand, I do not think I could have written the review any differently, given the express decision of thr author to write his book prescinding from varying Christian points of view. The result would have been a falsifying of who an apostle was as I understand him. I apologize for any misunderstanding and I invite the author to explain any mistake(s) of mine in the limited space provided here or in another book, which I will most willingly read. At age 91, however, I do not think I am qualified to make such a detailed study as writing such a book would require. **(14 April 2019)**