James A. Kelhoffer  
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The present volume is a collection of sixteen essays by James Kelhoffer, collected over fifteen years, all of which have been reworked in some way, some more significantly than others. The volume is divided into four parts (Methodological Observations, Conception of “Gospel” in Early Christianity, Struggles for Legitimacy, and Early Christian Virtues in Practice). It would be unfair to expect a volume of this nature to have too coherent a theme or to argue along one particular trajectory, yet some noteworthy trends in Kelhoffer’s scholarship do emerge, to which I will return at the end of this review.

The first essay, “New Testament Exegesis as an Academic Discipline with Relevance for Other Disciplines,” is a translation of Kelhoffer’s inaugural lecture at Upsalla University. In it he deals with what he identifies as the problem of the “balkanization of biblical studies” in the academy (11) and argues against what he exposes as a false dichotomy of old vs. new methodologies. Instead he calls for scholars to seek “dynamic interaction” (14) between historical-critical methodologies and newer, more literary approaches.

Chapter 2, “Early Christian Studies among the Academic Disciplines: Reflections on John the Baptist’s ‘Locusts and Wild Honey’,” continues to develop his trajectory in the study of John the Baptist’s diet. Though written first, this essay serves as a model for his comments in chapter 1 as he demonstrates the fruits of an interdisciplinary approach by vitiating the unnecessary boundary between socio-historical and historical-critical approaches.

Chapter 3, “The Significance of the Earthly Jesus in Matthew: A Response to Jack Dean Kingsbury,” concludes the methodological section of the volume with a brief note in response to Kingsbury’s portrayal of the Matthean Jesus. Kelhoffer avers that Kingsbury neglects important redactions of Mark in Matthew’s characterization of Jesus, such as the reworking of Mark 10:17–18 in Matthew 19:16–17, and significant Matthean omissions (e.g. Mark 1:23–28, 35–38, 45; 2:4; 3:11, 20–21).

The fourth essay, “‘How Soon a Book’ Revisited: ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ as a Reference to ‘Gospel’ Materials in the First Half of the Second Century,” takes up the question of the extent to which the term εὐαγγελίον can be considered to technically refer to a written text in the writings of the “Apostolic Fathers.” Kelhoffer argues for a middle way between the “maximalist” approach of Édouard Massaux and the “minimalist” approach of Helmut Koester. He contends that
the term does not become a discrete literary designation until the first half of the second century CE.

In chapter 5, “Basilides’s Gospel and _Exegetica_ (Treatises),” Kelhoffer directs his attention to the little studied second-century figure of Basilides of Alexandria. He offers a diachronic study of the primary sources of Basilides’s life to probe the potential content of his writings. He ultimately concludes that if something Basilides wrote achieved the status of “gospel” it nonetheless did not contain what we would recognize as Gospel material (i.e., the life and ministry of Jesus). Chapter 6, “The Struggle to Define _Heilsgeschichte_: Paul on the Origins of the Christian Tradition,” situates Paul’s presentation of the origins of the Christian tradition within the broader context of competing claims of origin. He demonstrates how depictions of the past, both near and distant, shed light on how Paul seeks to define the present for his communities.

The final essay of this section, “The Witness of Eusebius’s _ad Marinarium_ and Other Christian Writings to Text-Critical Debates concerning the Original Conclusion to Mark’s Gospel,” discusses the _ad Marinarium_, usually attributed to Eusebius, and its relation to the text-critical techniques of early Christians. Kelhoffer includes a translation of _ad Marinarium_ I.1–II.1 in parallel with the Greek text. His study of this disputed text elucidates important broader observations for the field, including a further example of the “widely contrasting perspectives in the early and Byzantine church” (159), here as it relates to the ending of Mark’s Gospel.

Chapter eight, “The Maccabees at Prayer: Pro- and Anti-Hasmonean Tendencies in the Prayers of First and Second Maccabees,” opens the section on legitimacy with a study of the divergent depictions of prayer in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Kelhoffer adroitly shows how supplications in 1 Macc advance Hasmonean legitimacy and the initiative of Judas Maccabeus. Conversely, Kelhoffer argues that prayers in 2 Macc function as “Deuteronomistic counter-supplications” (179) that shift attention back to God, away from Judas. He demonstrates well how even prayers can be and often were utilized to serve propagandistic purposes.

The ninth essay, “Suffering as Defense of Paul’s Apostolic Authority in Galatians and 1 Corinthians 11,” focuses attention on Paul’s defense of his apostolic authority through his experience of suffering, which Kelhoffer helpfully places in the context of competing valuations of suffering. He focuses primarily on Gal 4–5 and 2 Cor 11 as he cautions modern readers against uncritical acceptance of Paul’s valuations of his own suffering and calls for further examination in light of other early Christian literature, such as the Acts of the Apostles, to probe for further links between experiences of suffering and legitimation.