



## **Book Review**

Carvalho, Corrine L *Primer on Biblical Methods*. Winona: Anselm Academic, 2009.

Review by April Favarra

Corrine L. Carvalho's *Primer on Biblical Methods* is an excellent introductory tool for students of the biblical text, both for beginning undergraduate students, and students in the last years of secondary education (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades). This primer is a comprehensive introduction, despite its brevity, providing an overview of the critical methods of biblical interpretation. It can be a helpful guide for students first embarking on the practice of exegesis (or, critical interpretation), as it enables them to ask better and more informed questions of the text and to recognize and evaluate methodologies.

Carvalho begins by briefly walking the reader through historical-critical methods in biblical studies. She aptly entitles this first section: "The World Behind the Text." Each method is carefully introduced with specific attention given to issues or insights each particular method has for the study of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. What initially sets this primer apart is Carvalho's method of engaging the reader through questions and exercises from the biblical texts that give the student the opportunity to apply and evaluate each approach. She also highlights the main questions that each approach asks of the biblical text to better clue the student in to the particular focus of each method, and the insights it can reveal. For example, two questions that someone analyzing a text from a historical-critical approach might ask are: "What archaeological evidence is there for the historical context of the author or the setting of the text? How does that evidence either help explain the details of the text or contradict the text?" (24).

In the next section of the primer, Carvalho takes the student through methods that primarily focus on the "final form" of the biblical text; that is, she focuses on "The World of or within the Text." This section engages the student through exercises that follow each of the methods she outlines. The third section, entitled, "The World the Text Creates," mainly focuses on the relationship between the original setting of the text, and the meaning the text has for contemporary readers. The last section succinctly overviews the increased interest in the history of interpretation of particular biblical texts, focusing on brief illustrations of traditional interpretations of passages from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. This section also has at its conclusion exercises that enable the student to interact with the different approaches for engaging the history of biblical interpretation.

Carvalho is, of course, attentive to long established methods of interpretation, such as textual and rhetorical criticism, but it is her attention to methods of interpretation that have only recently gained traction in the field of biblical studies that makes this book such an excellent resource for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms. Carvalho thoughtfully introduces more recent methodologies and approaches, such as New Historicism, ideological criticism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminist interpretations, and materialist approaches. These introductions prepare students to engage methods that not only resonate with contemporary settings, but also open up a wider range of readings.

This book is accessible to the beginner yet challenging and provocative enough for students seriously interested in engaging the biblical texts on a more critical level. While the book is primarily geared towards undergraduate students, the author's clarity and conciseness and engaging exercises make this work potentially valuable in a secondary education classroom setting.

If the secondary educator does not wish to incorporate the book into assigned reading for the class, each of the sections in the book can be easily incorporated into a lesson plan, using the exercises Carvalho has at the conclusion of each section as a way to engage students after a short lecture on the material. For instance, an educator could use Carvalho's section on Redaction Criticism in a particular lesson, and then engage the students through a group (or individual) activity using the exercises that Carvalho provides. Exercise #2 in this section reads: "Compare the accounts of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness found in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 with the presumably earlier version in Mark 1:12-13. What kinds of changes do the two later texts make to Mark's version? Why might they make those changes?" (19).

After assigning each student to a group of 2-3 other students, the educator could provide copies of the three accounts for each student to compare, and formulate answers to the questions with their groups. After giving the students time to work together in their groups, it may be a good idea to bring the class together and discuss what each group has discovered in their comparison, as well as any implications of their discoveries. This is just one example of how easily and effectively Carvalho's work can be incorporated into the classroom in order to begin to engage students with the biblical text and further develop their critical thinking skills.

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