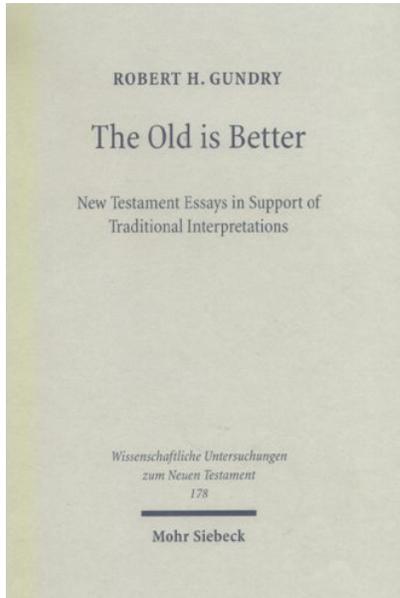


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Gundry, Robert H.

The Old Is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations

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This volume contains a collection of previously published essays with some unpublished material by Robert H. Gundry (formerly professor at Westmont College in California). The essays are loosely connected to the theme of how traditional interpretations about the New Testament and the early postapostolic church are said to be better than their alternatives in modern biblical study (see Luke 5:39 in the KJV: “The old is better”).

The first essay, “Hermeneutic Liberty, Theological Diversity, and Historical Occasionalism in the Biblical Canon,” attempts to give due heed to the historical contingency of the biblical documents and the necessity of wrestling with the diversity of the biblical witnesses. The diversity in New Testament Christology is given as a test case.

In “The Symbiosis of Theology and Genre Criticism of the Canonical Gospels,” Gundry examines the history of genre criticism of the Gospels, which is said to parallel developments in modern theology related to Jesus (e.g., the Gospels as *bios* supports a strong desire to link the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, while the Gospels as *kerygma* fits with an existential theology, etc). For Gundry, the Gospels are *sui generis* and were written because: “The spread of the church far from its place of origin and the dying off of Jesus’ original disciples created a felt need for records” (39).

In “The Apostolically Johannine Pre-Papian Tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew,” Gundry argues that Papias wrote around 110 C.E., perhaps even earlier, and the elder whom Papias refers to is none other than the apostle John. In light of that, Gundry proposes that we should accept the traditional ascriptions of the Gospel of Mark to John Mark and the Gospel of Matthew to the Apostle Matthew and likewise accept the traditions concerning the Petrine origins of the Markan Gospel.

Gundry maintains “On The Secret Gospel of Mark” that, contra Helmut Koester and John Dominic Crossan, canonical Mark predates the Secret Gospel of Mark. He asserts that, “we should regard SGM [Secret Gospel of Mark] as apocryphal non-Markan additions to canonical Mark ... which post-date the other Gospels too and which the Carpocratians supplemented for their own purposes” (95). However, in light of Stephen Carlson's convincing study, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005), that Morton Smith forged the existence of Secret Mark, the entire chapter is somewhat dated in light of recent discussion.

Also pertaining to Mark is “Jesus’ Blasphemy according to Mark 14:61b–64 and the *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 7:5,” which attempts to harmonize the trial scene in Mark with the Mishnaic ruling that blasphemy includes pronouncing the Tetragrammaton. Gundry argues that Jesus did pronounce the Tetragrammaton at his hearing before the Sanhedrin, and Mark records the jurist version quoted to witnesses, which substitutes “the Power” for “Yahweh.”

Then begins a number of Matthean studies. The first is entitled “Matthew: Jewish-Christian or Christian-Jewish? At an Intersection of Sociology and Theology.” There Gundry contests the depiction of Matthew’s community as a sect within Judaism as advocated by Anthony Saldarini and Alan Segal. According to Gundry, Matthew’s Gospel represents a form of Jewish Christianity that has broken away from Judaism. While I think that Gundry presents a good case that the Christology and polemics of Matthew’s Gospel implies the existence of a community that has broken with common Judaism, I would prefer to see the relationship between Matthew’s community and Judaism as complex and fluid rather than positing a “clean break” between the two (115).

The second Matthean essay, “Salvation in Matthew,” examines a variety of issues about Matthean soteriology: What does salvation consist in? Who does the saving? Who are the saved? How are they saved? When are they saved? The answers are then related to a proposed *Sitz im Leben* that occasioned Matthew’s soteriological emphases. Gundry surmises that it arose from “an intramural crisis of discipleship within a Jewish Christianity persecuted by non-Christian Judaism” (127). This is a fine chapter; the only qualm I have is that Matthew’s salvific imperative (i.e., perseverance by righteous works)

is indelibly connected to a salvific indicative (i.e., save people from their sins), and Gundry does not speak much toward the type of connection between the two (but see further Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 32–43).

In the third Matthean essay, “The Sermon on the Mount according to H.D. Betz,” Gundry criticizes the tradition-historical conclusions behind Betz’s landmark commentary in the Hermeneia series. Gundry contests Betz’s view that the Sermon was incorporated into Q and then incorporated by Matthew without redaction. He also asserts that Betz’s analysis produces a Jesus who is “something of a Jewish liberal” (148). Instead, Gundry prefers a more traditional view that the final shape of the Sermon is attributable to Matthean redaction.

Gundry argues against James Robinson and Christopher Heil in “Spinning the Lilies and Unraveling the Ravens: An Alternative Reading of Q 12:22b–31 and P. Oxy. 655,” where he contends that P. Oxy. 655 presents a redaction of Q or its canonical derivatives. That is in contrast to Robinson and Heil, who detect in P. Oxy. 655 a tradition earlier than that of Q 12:22b–25.

In “The Essential Physicality of Jesus’ Resurrection according to the New Testament,” Gundry maintains that the New Testament consistently teaches that Jesus’ body was resurrected into a physical form after his burial. He rejects attempts to conceive of Jesus’ resurrection body as something that is immaterial/spiritual. The chapter concludes with an addendum on anthropology where Gundry defends a dualistic view of human beings as consisting of material and immaterial elements over and against strict physicalists.

In the first of several essays on Paul, Gundry writes on “The Inferiority of the New Perspective on Paul.” He contests principally E. P. Sanders’s portrait of the apostle Paul whereby Paul purportedly mirrored elements of covenantal nomism in his own pattern of religion. Gundry argues that Jewish soteriology was synergistic in mixing faith and works, whereas for Paul works had only an evidential rather than instrumental function in salvation. Gundry sees little value in the New Perspective apart from the socially unitive functions attributed to Paul’s soteriology.

Concerning “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” Gundry takes issue with Reformed conceptions of justification as resting on the imputation of the active obedience of Jesus Christ to sinners. He finds the kind of language and reasoning used in support of that thesis to be entirely lacking from Paul’s writings. For Gundry, Paul does not match the imputation of sins to Christ with an imputation of Christ’s righteousness

to the sinner. The excision of the notion of imputation may also prevent a shortchanging of sanctification that often occurs in the Protestant tradition.

A further Pauline essay is “The Moral Frustration of Paul before His Conversion: Sexual Lusts in Romans 7:7–25,” which is heavily updated and interacts with more recent literature since its original publication in 1980. Gundry defends the traditional perspective that Rom 7:7–25 describes the moral frustration of the pre-Christian Paul and that Paul describes this via his own experience of coming to sexual maturity and adult responsibility in Judaism.

The Christ Hymn of Phil 2 is discussed in “Style and Substance in Philippians 2:6–11.” In this very technical essay, Gundry opts for Pauline authorship of the hymn and sees the emphasis as falling on a contrast of Christ’s crucifixion and exaltation, rather than upon a contrast of his incarnation and preexistent glory. The essay includes appendices on assonance and euphony in the hymn and the thematic correlations with Isa 52:13–53:12.

A final Pauline piece is “The Hellenization of Dominical tradition and Christianization of Jewish Tradition in the Eschatology of 1–2 Thessalonians.” Here Gundry advocates that Paul hellenizes dominical tradition by depicting Christ’s *parousia* as a festive imperial visit that deceased and living Christians participate in. This serves to correct an aberrant belief that the *parousia* will not involve the deceased. Paul also christianizes Jewish tradition according to Gundry, in order to heighten readiness for Christ’s return, but without an overheated belief in its immediacy. Gundry also maintains that Paul did not teach a taking of the saints to heaven after a midair U-turn by Jesus at the *parousia*.

Coming to Johannine studies, in “Is John’s Gospel Sectarian?” Gundry suggests that the Fourth Gospel is indeed sectarian according to accepted definitions of “sectarian” by modern sociologists. He regards attempts to lessen the negative perspective on outsiders in the Gospel of John as entirely inadequate. Gundry also notes the irony that “this strongly sectarian Gospel has attained great popularity even in the large and relatively unsectarian sectors of Christendom” (323).

“How the Word in John’s Prologue Pervades the Rest of the Fourth Gospel” is Gundry’s attempt to show that a Word-Christology pervades the whole of John’s Gospel much more than is often recognized in scholarship. That would imply that the Prologue was no secondary addition to the Gospel but corresponds to the overall shape of the narrative and its theology. Here Gundry reminds me of the words of the German scholar Lars Kierspel, who, at a paper on the Jews in the Fourth Gospel, memorably uttered: “Unless you come to Jesus through the Prologue you are a thief of meaning and a killer of context.”

On the subject of “The Sense and Syntax of John 3:14–17 with Special Reference to the Use of οὕτως ... ὥστε in John 3:16,” Gundry contends that the locution would have been understood not in terms of degree (i.e., the depth of God’s love for the world) but in terms of an aforementioned manner and a parallel addition (i.e., the means by which God loved the world). He opts for a translation, “for in this way God loved the world; and so God gave the only Son” (376).

The penultimate essay concerns the “Angelomorphic Christology in the Book of Revelation,” where Gundry endeavors to demonstrate that angel-Christology occurs throughout the Apocalypse. He gives a particular case study based on the Jesuanic imagery attributed to the angel in Rev 10 (over and against the views of P. Carrell and A. Y. Collins) and asserts that an angel-Christology is primitive and precedes the composition of the Fourth Gospel.

The final essay, also on Revelation, is “The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People.” There Gundry interprets the city as its people, as opposed to their abode or dwelling place, since the Old Testament often uses place names for people rather than for geographical locations.

The unifying theme of Gundry’s essays is to be aware of the syndrome that idolizes the “latest and the greatest” in biblical interpretation and naïvely supposes that older perspectives are necessarily passé. The collection is impressive simply on the basis of its breadth (New Testament theology, source criticism, Gospel of Mark, Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ resurrection, apostle Paul, Gospel of John, and Revelation). The essays also testify to Robert Gundry’s rich and vibrant contribution to biblical scholarship over the years and cap a fruitful career as a Christian academic.