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Mutie's "Death in second-century Christian thought: The meaning of death in earliest Christianity" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Death in second-century Christian thought: The meaning of death in earliest Christianity. Eugene, OR: Pickwick. 228 pp. \$29.00. ISBN 9781498201643

Jeremiah Mutie is Professor of Bible and Theology at Southern California Seminary. He argues in, *Death in Second-Century Christian Thought*, that “second-century Christians carefully selected, adapted, and utilized existing views on death from the Old Testament, Greco-Roman culture, and the documents that eventually became the New Testament to present a distinctively Christian concept of death commensurate with their level of progressive revelation” (p. ix). Thus, second-century Christians reinterpreted “Old Testament views of death to reflect the new situation of Jesus’ post-resurrection” (p. ix). This book is the result of his dissertation completed at Dallas Theological Seminary.

The content of the book interacts with two competing views in the literature concerning death in the second-century for Christians. One view understands second-century Christian thought concerning death to be completely contrast to Greek concepts of death (p. 191). Another prominent view understands second-century Christian thought concerning death to be completely Hellenized (192). In response to these views, Mutie proposes the “adaptation and modification” motif “as a meaningful interpretive grid to help us define death in the second century” (p. 192). Through this motif, Mutie concludes that “second-century Christians borrowed and modified existing views of death, adapting and modifying them in light of the level of the progressive revelation that they had, to construct a distinctly Christian concept of death” (p. 192). For Mutie, the concept of “adaptation and modification” is important as it reveals that Harnack’s argument “that the gospel rapidly stripped itself of the forms of Judaism and united itself with Greco-Roman forms is not necessarily true” (p. 196). In other words, what Christians did in the second-century was not merely “rubber-stamping” Greek concepts. Rather, the work of Christians in the second-century was “a highly critical modification of the existing views of death” (p. 196).

Mutie’s volume is scholarly in nature and accomplishes his goal to present the reader with another method of interpreting death in second-century Christian thought. In addition, Mutie has provided detailed and thorough footnotes which support his various claims and provide resources for further study.

Reviewer

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