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Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts eds., (2018) *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*. Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 12; Early Christianity in Its Hellenistic Context 4; Leiden-Boston: Brill. XVIII + 579 pp. €187.00 / \$225.00. ISBN 978-90-04-37274-0 (e-book, pdf).

Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts have edited the collection of essays *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement* with Brill. This volume is also a part of the series of edited volumes dealing with the conventional aspect rhetorically entitled “Christian origins” and its contexts within the Roman empire, namely *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Literary and Social Contexts for the New Testament* (EHC 1; TENTS 9; Leiden: Brill, 2013), *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Literary and Social Contexts for the New Testament* (EHC 2; TENTS 10; Leiden: Brill, 2013) and *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development* (EHC 3; LBS 6; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

The way in which this collection of essays is a continuation of the volumes mentioned above is reflected in scope and methodology. Written by leading experts in their disciplines, the essays collected within this volume explore dimensions considered important for the entangled multifaceted topic of “Christian origins,” providing new insights and useful cross-references to the “other” cultural phenomena and specific theoretical debates. Unfortunately for the reader these perspectives remain locked within the same trend of mainstream theoretical and methodological discourses.

The volume has four parts, twenty-five chapters, and two indexes. The detailed introduction of the volume is signed by the editors (1–8). The numerous questions unveiled within this volume tackle issues pertaining to the possible relation with the in-between Christian origins and the establishment of the early Jesus movement (1). This is the reason why the main question of the volume is formulated as follows: “How did this early phase of Christianity propel its literary and social momentum into the first century?” (1).

The first part is dedicated to the formation of the Jesus movement and its precursors (9–86). The chapters within this part manage to present new insights into the topic of “the formation” of the Jesus movement, however they do not consider the possibility of a plural movement nor do they take into account the aspect of diversity. The reader is consequently faced with the situation to ask herself: what is the Jesus movement or is there a plurality of movements coagulated around the name of Jesus? The fact that no answer is provided to such question unveils and confines the theoretical position for these perspectives. The reader is conventionally guided through several closely related directions from “precursors” such as John the Baptist, to Luke’s

usage of the Gospel of John, to the baptism ritual and early Christianity, to a rounding off article of this part on the relation between master-student in Palestinian rabbinic texts.

The second part contains studies related to the production of early Christian gospels as a byproduct of the early Jesus movement (87–184). As presented to the reader, these essays promote a unilateral view (in-between the borders of what “canonical” could or would border) on the idea of the production of “early Christian gospels,” and employ a soft comparison with “other” cultural products. The first essay of this part represents a reassertion of E.P. Sanders’s research on Synoptic tendencies and their transmission. Then it follows an essay which questions if Matthew was a plagiarist. A third essay tackles the comparison between Plutarch’s *Lives* and the canonical Gospels in order to emphasize the literary strategies employed in these corpuses of textualities. The last essay is dedicated to the exploration of the narrative of the fourth gospel and with an assessment of the recent study of the so-called Cross Gospel.

The third part encompasses studies on early Christian descriptions of the Jesus movement (185–389). Here it is questioned and detailed: 1) the early Aramaic-speaking congregation in Jerusalem, 2) Jesus’s healing narratives, 3) the failure of the Q community thesis, 4) the positions of Mark and Paul on an imminent Parousia, 5) the methodological developments of the future imperial gospel research, 6) the recent narrative approaches and the traditional redaction-critical understandings of Mark, 7) the issues of unity and diversity within gospel accounts of the Spirit, 8) the in-between linkage *kerygma* and Exodus connected to Paul, 9) Matthew’s deployment of the Jonah-complex and the confession of Peter, and finally 10) a comparison of the parables of Jesus with those of Socrates.

The fourth and the last part of this collection of essays deals with the Jewish mission and its literature (391–534). Starting with an essay on the unity of the Catholic Epistles, then moving to an essay dedicated to the relationship between 1 John and the Johannine mission, continuing with an essay on the analysis of the Johannine letters and the love command, then to an essay focusing on the new perspective on Peter and his role in Gentile relations within the early church, further with an essay on the analysis of linguistic structure of the Petrine corpus, and closing up with the investigations on the themes in 1 Peter.

The diversity of these essays showcases the authors’ various interests and some of the strategical intertextual nuances to which they have arrived within their scholarly endeavors. The theoretical movements within this collection of essays display how the mainstream approaches still avoid discussing a larger picture of early Christianities and continue to endorse the same opinions and views which shed light on the same old paths of research. Up to one

point, marked by the obvious diversity of early Christianities, this collection of essays can be regarded as a useful tool for students of late antiquity and early Christianities. However, relative to the parts of the scholarly corpus that are dedicated to the “Christian origins” one could ask whose “Christian origins” are they aiming at and what is the outcome that they seek?

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