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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v44i1.8312>

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2024
44(1):366-368

Date received:
2 May 2024

Date published:
28 June 2024

BOOK REVIEW

Research on the Letter to the Galatians 2000-2020

D. F. Tolmie, 2 vols. (Auckland Park: UJ Press, 2023), pp. 412 (vol. 1), pp. 340 (vol. 2), Price ± R400 each, ISBN: 978-1776436026 (vol. 1), 978-1776436064 (vol. 2).

Francois Tolmie is an expert on the Letter to the Galatians. In this double-volume set, Tolmie provides an overview of research on the Letter to the Galatians from 2000 to 2020. This is not the first time that Tolmie delivers an overview of research on the Pauline corpus. Similar previous publications include “Tendencies in the research on the Letter to Philemon since 1980” (Tolmie 2010); “Research on the Letter to the Galatians: 2000-2010” (Tolmie 2012), and “Pauline studies in South Africa: Did anything change in 50 years?” (Tolmie 2016).

The publication under discussion, apart from providing an overview on research on the Letter to the Galatians,

attempts to bring together research on particular aspects in an accessible way so that other scholars will be able to grasp easily what has already been done and to understand the tendencies dominating the research of a specific issue and thus be in a position to identify and develop novel avenues for further research (p. v).



Published by the UFS
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While the body of literature that is covered is impressive, the interaction with literature is limited to presenting an overview of the research and not to present an evaluation. In Volume 1, five main areas of research are covered, whereas in Volume 2, research is discussed in respect of specific pericopes in the letter.

The following areas of research are covered in volume 1:

- Introductory issues (authorship, occasion, historical issues, possible backgrounds for interpreting Galatians).
- Text-critical, linguistic, stylistic, and translation issues.
- The *Wirkungsgeschichte* (reception history) of the letter (the early church, the Middle Ages, the 16th to the 18th centuries, the 19th to the 21st centuries, studies covering broader periods of time).
- Interpretative approaches (Paul's use of Hebrew Scriptures, social-scientific/sociological, epistolographical, rhetorical, narrative, semiotic, intertextual, recipient-oriented, psychological, ideology-critical, and other).
- The theology of the letter (approaches to the theology of the letter, Paul's self-understanding, the tradition behind the letter, the theology of the letter as a whole, revelation and gospel/truth, theo-logy [God], Christology, pneumatology, cosmology, anthropology and ethnicity, Israel and the covenant with Abraham, law, soteriology, ecclesiology, Christian existence and spirituality, ethics, missiology, eschatology and apocalypticism).

Volume 2 is arranged under the following pericopes: Galatians 1:1-5, 6-10, 11-24; 2:1-10, 11-21; 3:1-5, 6-14, 15-18, 19-25, 26-29; 4:1-7, 8-11, 12-20, 21-31/5:1; 5:1/2-6, 7-12; 5:13-6:10; 11-18. Under each of these pericopes, there is slight variation on the issues that are covered, including introductory issues, text-critical, linguistic, stylistic, and translation issues, background, reception history, interpretative approaches and theological issues. While Tolmie does not provide an overview of the content of commentaries that were published from 2000 to 2020, he does include a list of such commentaries at the end of Volume 2.

Inevitably, as Tolmie admits,

[d]ue to the fact that some studies fit in more than one category, they are discussed or at least mentioned in more than one section (p. v).

As a consequence, some paragraphs or sections of paragraphs are exactly or virtually the same. For example, in Volume 2, paragraph 2, on page 109 (Dumbrell 2000; Du Toit 2018) corresponds to paragraph 3 on page 135 (Dumbrell 2000) and paragraph 3 on page 136 (Du Toit 2018). This is because the “covenant”, as a theological issue in Galatians 3:1-5 (p. 109), corresponds to “Israel, covenant and Abraham” as theological issue in Galatians 3:6-14 (pp. 135-137). Many other such instances can be pointed out. This should not be considered a shortcoming, however, but rather a sign of consistency and comprehensiveness.

While the two volumes are logically structured according to topics (Vol. 1) and pericopes (Vol. 2) and easy to navigate, references to various authors’ works are only listed in footnotes. A bibliography or even an author index would have added value to the work. Overall, Tolmie’s 2-volume work is a helpful aid to researchers on the Letter to the Galatians, both in respect of methodologies, interpretative issues, and the interpretation of specific pericopes. This work does not merely provide an overview of the research on the letter, but also presents it in an understandable and accessible manner. Tolmie’s work is thus highly recommended for future researchers on the Letter to the Galatians.

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