

Beavis, M A 2006 – *Jesus and Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World*

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Reviewer: Dr Gert J Malan (Mosselbay)

Mary Ann Beavis is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology at St Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada. With this study, she proposes to contribute a new perspective on the topic of the kingdom of God, by bringing together two bodies of inquiry: the study of the kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus, and the study of ancient utopian literature.

Her point of departure is the understanding that *utopia* is a wordplay on the Greek *ou-topos* "no place" and *eu-topos* "good place", although this double meaning does not reflect in the ancient usage by Lucian of Samosata, who in turn inherited the term from Hellenistic novels no longer extant. In her study, *utopia* generally refers to imaginary societies and *eutopia* refers to efforts of movements with the goal of improving society. Following Manuel and Manuel, her study presupposes a "utopian propensity" in humankind, which comprehends diverse, although often overlapping and interrelated, traditions, philosophies, cultures, images, desires, and literary genres.

The consideration of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God is preceded by four chapters. Chapter 1, on ancient, classical and Hellenistic utopias, examines mythical, paradisaical, and fantastic utopias, including the myth of the golden age of Kronos; the Elysian Fields and the Islands of the Blessed; the myth of Atlantis; hellenistic utopian romances; philosophical proposals for ideal city-states (notably Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*); Aristophanes' comic gynocratic utopia, the *Ecclesiazusai*; the idealized societies of Sparta and Athens; and the few surviving accounts of ancient attempts to form societies built on utopian principles.

Chapter 2, on biblical and Jewish utopias, covers the myth of Eden and its biblical and Jewish developments, and idealized portrayals of the land of Israel, both temporal/locative (thus idealizations of the land and eras in Israel's history) and legal/covenantal utopias (idealizations of Torah).

In Chapter 3, she examines the possibly unique phenomenon of the formation of utopian communities in early Judaism, especially the Essenes (widely associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls) the Therapeutai (a group of Egyptian Jewish monastic philosophers) and the *havurah* (a Pharisaic utopian innovation). She compares each of these movements to the kinds of hellenistic utopias, mentioned earlier.

Leading up to the discussion of Jesus and the *basileia* movement, Chapter 4 surveys the secondary literature on the meaning of the kingdom of God in the context of Jesus' ministry, under the following headings: translation and usage; tradition history; temporal reference (a present or future reality?); the nature of the language of the kingdom (concept, symbol or metaphor?); political interpretations of the kingdom (Jesus as revolutionary, social radical, or national restorationist?); and finally feminist formulations of the "kingdom of God" (or *basileia*) movement.

In the final chapter, she considers Jesus' *basileia* message in the context of the ancient utopias, especially the biblical ones with special reference to descriptions of idealised societies (utopianism) and ideas about divine rule (theocracy). She concludes that Jesus, living during a period when nationalism was out of vogue with many Jews, did not subscribe to a restorationist theology, but rather that he, and the movement to which he belonged, proclaimed the ancient myth of God as king of Israel and of the world, past, present and future, in an antipolitical (although not apolitical) way. She also finds similarities between the *basileia* and other ancient utopian formulations, both biblical and nonbiblical.

Beavis' study is a refreshing and unique approach to Jesus and his preaching about the kingdom of God. She argues her case convincingly and with compelling evidence, and in the end she sheds new light on the topic of the kingdom of God. It is indeed a book to be recommended to anybody interested in the historical Jesus, his preaching about the kingdom of God, and the *basileia* movement.

Lewis, A 2000 – 'n Seisoen van heel word: Daaglikse gedagtes vir 'n tyd van verlies
(2005 Afrikaanse weergawe deur prof Pieter G R de Villiers)

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Resensent: Dr W J Smith (Benoni)

'n *Seisoen van heelword* is gedurende 2000 deur *One caring place*, Abbey Press, St Meinrad, Indiana gepubliseer onder die titel *A healing year*. Hierdie werk van Alaric Lewis is gedurende 2005 uit Engels vertaal deur prof Pieter G R de Villiers, emeritus-professor in Nuwe Testament aan die Rhodes Universiteit (Grahamstad) en deelyds betrokke by die Departement Ou en Nuwe Testament aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch.

Hierdie werk van Lewis neem die vorm van 366 dagstukkies. Dit is nie 'n Bybelse dagboek in die ware sin van die woord nie aangesien Lewis nie by elke dagstukkie die Bybel as vertrekpunt gebruik nie. Tereg merk De Villiers in sy nawoord op dat hierdie tekste "geestelik" gelees behoort te word aan die hand van die metode bekend as *lectio divina*. Dit is 'n metode waardeur die leser gelei word om die goddelike aard van die tekste te herken en om die "... heiligende, helende uitwerking daarvan te ervaar." *Lectio divina* is gerig op die individu en op wat God persoonlik vir die individu wil sê. Daarvoor is dit nodig dat individue bewus sal wees dat geen mens op sy of haar eie by God kan uitkom nie. God kom by mense uit deur sy Woord. Soos reeds vermeld, is dit nie in die eerste plek Lewis se vertrekpunt nie. Aan die begin van verskeie dagstukkies word wel 'n Bybelse teks aangehaal, maar dan is die inhoud daarvan nie noodwendig 'n refleksie op wat die bedoeling van die besondere teks sou wees nie. Die skrywer begin etlike dagstukkies met aanhalings van geestelikes oor eeue heen, asook aanhalings uit die Apokriewe. Die probleem natuurlik is dat hierdie aanhalings dieselfde kanonieke waarde ontvang as die aangehaalde Bybeltekste. Dit lei tot vervlakking en humanisering van die Skrif en bou 'n spiritualiteit waarmee nie alle lesers sal kan identifiseer nie.

Wat wel van belang is, is dat Lewis uitgaan van die standpunt dat rou en die verwerking van verlies 'n proses is en wat tyd neem om te verwerk. Vir hom is dit nie tyd wat genesing bring nie, maar die wyse waarop daardie tyd ingerig word. Die boek bied verrykende gedagtes en voorstelle om emosionele en geestelike genesing te bevorder. Omdat verlies en rou ter eniger tyd in mense se lewens kan gebeur, deel Lewis die aantal dagstukkies nie chronologies volgens die maande van die jaar in nie, maar in weke en dae.

Dit blyk of die boek moontlik gebore kon wees vanuit die skrywer se persoonlike ervaring van verlies. Vir lesers kan hierdie empatiese mee- en saamleef baie beteken deur die ervaring te hê dat hulle deur iemand verstaan word. Dit is 'n selfhelp boek wat daaglikse gedagtes van troos en hoop vir 'n tyd van verlies wil bied deurdat dit die leser wil begelei om die teenwoordigheid van God te ervaar. Of Lewis hierin slaag, sal 'n vraag wees wat elke leser vanuit sy of haar eie ervaring van verlies behoort te antwoord. Tog kan lesers daaraan