

Book Review Instructions

Format is critical in a book review. *Read this page carefully, and abide by the formatting conventions for a book review. Reviews submitted in the incorrect format will be returned ungraded.*

See Sample book reviews on website.

The functions of a book view are: (1) to provide an *accurate and succinct* account of the thesis argued by the author, and (2) a *critical evaluation* of the author's argument. Since reviews are limited to 1000–2000 words, concise and highly focused description is imperative. You cannot afford to waste space on matters peripheral to the main thesis or in needless repetition.

In outlining the author's thesis, one cannot rehearse all of her/his arguments, but it is important to give enough of the main points so that the reader of the review can both understand the substance of the argument and can appreciate your evaluation. Write as if your imaginary reader has not yet read the book, but needs to know whether it is worth reading. This means that you must explain the author's project, outline his/her methods and approach, and provide a *representative sample* of conclusions. The summary of the book should occupy about two-thirds of the review.

Critical evaluation means engaging the author's project and commenting (approvingly or otherwise) on the (a) method(s) adopted by the author, (b) her/his use of evidence, (c) the cogency of the author's conclusions, and/or (d) the value of the author's project. Since you do not have space to evaluate every argument, it is wise to select two or three *major* points made by the author, and comment on these, explaining why in your view they are convincing or unconvincing.

A review is not the place for venting one's own theories; *ad hominem* attacks should be avoided. The review should be fair to the author's stated intention. It is not fair to criticize the author for not doing what she/he never intended to do. Nor should matters peripheral to the author's argument receive excessive attention.

A book review is the place for *brief* comment on layout & design, typography, binding and price, but normally only when there are an excessive number of misprints or a disproportionately high price, given the nature of the volume.

The critical evaluation should occupy about one-third of the review.

Format: Do not use a title page. Instead, at the top of the first page provide the *full* publication data of the book under review. E.g.,

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. Cloth. Pp. xxxiv + 507. ISBN 0-06-061607-5.

Do not use footnotes. Normally, you should not quote extensively in the book review. If there is some sentence or phrase that is particularly apt, you may wish to quote it; in this case, insert that page reference after the quotation. E.g., Crossan characterizes the Jesus movement as “hippies in a world of Augustan yuppies” (p. 421). If you cite other literature, the full bibliographical reference should be included as an in-text citation. E.g., As Joachim Jeremias (*The Parables of Jesus* [revised ed.; London: SCM, 1971] 233) has shown....

Your name goes at the end of the review.

Grading

- A 93-100: *Outstanding*. Precise and concise précis of the book. A critical evaluation which reflects a grasp of central methodological, evidentiary and/or evaluative issues, and the ability to situate the author's work in the broader context of gospel research.
- A- 90-92 *Outstanding*. As "A" but may be slightly lacking in either the précis or in the evaluative component.
- B+ 77-79 *Excellent*. This grade normally indicates that the précis is accurate and concise and there is good evidence of critical evaluation, but the evaluative component could be better focused, or less general.
- B 74-76 *Superior*. Generally accurate account and analysis of the contents; some critical evaluation.
- B- 70-73 *Superior*. As "B" but somewhat lacking in detail, balance, careful analysis, argument or critical reasoning.
- C+ 67-69 *Good*. Adequate précis of the contents, but may be diffuse or unbalanced so that important aspects of the thesis are omitted. Little in the way of critical engagement with the author's thesis.
- C 64-66 *Adequate*. The précis is generally adequate though it is perhaps unbalanced or insufficiently detailed or impressionistic. No real critical evaluation.
- C- 60-63 *Poor*. Deficient in both the précis and the evaluation.
- D+ 57-59 *Inadequate*. Sloppy, imprecise or careless summary; no evaluation.
- D 54-56 *Inadequate*.
- D- 50-53 *Inadequate*.