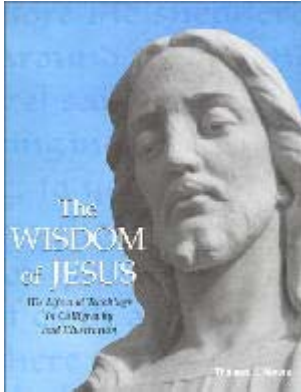


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Moore, Thomas J.

The Wisdom of Jesus: His Life and Teachings in Calligraphy and Illustration

New York: Paulist Press, 1999. Pp. vi + 105, Paperback, \$12.95, ISBN 080913909X.

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This collection of photographs and scripture citations was compiled by Thomas J. Moore, a medical doctor and Bible Study leader from Indiana (not the similarly named author of recently popular spiritual/psychological works). The forty-six photos, three-quarters of which were taken by Moore himself, include depictions of nature, people, stained glass windows, churches, statues and other religious objects. The pictures are juxtaposed with just over one hundred biblical quotations, printed in a calligraphy-style font, taken from five different translations of the Bible (mostly NIV and NRSV, but also KJV, RSV, and NEB). Photos and texts alternate on almost every other page, except for one section with only scripture citations but no photos (pp. 25-37).

The book begins with a prologue and a section on “The Birth of Christ.” The central focus is on “The Teachings of Christ,” “Jesus’ Message of Salvation,” and “The Good Shepherd.” Finally, a section of “The Death and Resurrection of Christ” is followed by an epilogue. The only words written by Moore himself, however, are a one-page introduction and an overview printed on the back cover. He states the reason for this approach: “I have avoided making commentary about the scripture presented. I believe that faith is personal, and that each reader should form his or her own thoughts concerning each verse” (p. 1). But Moore actually has added his own “commentary” in various ways, by combining texts from different biblical books, juxtaposing these with particular pictures, adding headings to each page, and arranging everything in discrete sections. He also abbreviates longer passages (e.g. John 10 on p. 55, or John 13 on p. 79) and rearranges the order of verses (e.g. Matt 6:25-27, 33, 24, 19-21 on pp. 49-51). All of these are forms of interpretation, albeit more subtle than explicit verbal commentary.

Despite the book's title, only half of the quotations are from the words of Jesus in the Gospels (esp. John and Matthew). Over twenty citations are from NT Epistles (mostly Paul) and another two dozen from the OT (mostly Psalms and Isaiah). The application of OT passages to Jesus, their juxtaposition with certain NT texts, and their associations with specific images all influence how someone reads a particular scriptural text. For example, the pages entitled "The Good Shepherd" combine Ps 23 and John 10:2, 4, 7-8, 11, with a picture of a Bedouin and some sheep (pp. 54-55). The next two pages, entitled "The Lost Sheep," juxtapose Isa 55:5-6, Luke 15:3-7, and a stained glass image of Jesus holding a small sheep, thereby affecting the reader's interpretation of the text from Isaiah ("Seek the Lord while he may be found...").

The pictures themselves will provoke many interesting reflections. For example, an abbreviated citation of Ps 1:1-3 is illustrated with a statue of Abraham Lincoln (pp. 6-7), while the command of the Johannine Jesus to "love one another" (John 13:34) is juxtaposed with Norman Rockwell's well-known print entitled "Do Unto Others" (depicting people of various ages, races and religions, and citing Matt 7:12 // Luke 6:31).

The section and page headings (all listed in the Table of Contents, but some not printed on the interior pages; pp. 11, 21, 71, 83, 85, 89, and 93), are also subtly influential. For example, Moore first cites John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...") in his section on "The Birth of Christ," although in its Johannine context it refers primarily to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, quoting John 14:12-14 ("...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...") under the title "Miracles" (p. 105) implies that these "greater works" refer to "miracles," although many Johannine scholars would disagree with this interpretation.

Thus, even though this was obviously not intended as a work of critical scholarship, Moore's claim that he has "purposely excluded any commentary on the enclosed scriptures" (back cover) is misleading. It would have been better for him, or his editors at Paulist Press, to acknowledge that juxtaposing OT and NT texts with one another and with selected titles and photos is, in fact, a type of "commentary." Then he also could have encouraged his readers to reflect on how their own understandings of the words of Jesus are affected by the OT texts and the associated illustrations.

Nevertheless, this attractive little volume will make a nice gift book and will probably find its way onto numerous coffee tables. It will certainly stimulate people's reflections on the life and teachings of Jesus through its combination of scriptures and pictures.