In this monograph Barry D. Smith (Crandall University, Moncton, New Brunswick) advances the thesis that apparently divergent approaches to the kingdom of God in the Jesus tradition can be reconciled if it be allowed that Jesus used this metaphor—his “preferred term for Israel’s eschatological salvation”—differently in different situations or contexts in his ministry. So, Smith says, “[i]t is necessary to differentiate two historical contexts for Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God” (1, emphasis original). At the outset, therefore, it is clear to the reader that Smith intends this book to be a historical study of Jesus’ views about the kingdom rather than a study of how the Synoptic tradition represents those views. He writes: “Adopting the methodology of distinguishing two contexts for Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God has the advantage of allowing the Jesus-researcher to appreciate how Jesus modifies his teaching on the Kingdom of God in light of the rejection of it” (2).

Accordingly, Smith calls these two different historical contexts the “non-rejection context” and the “rejection context” (1–2 and throughout). In a nonrejection context, Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was both “a present reality … the climax of all salvation history … inseparably connected to himself” (3, and ch. 1), yet one that is yet to reach its culmination in the eschatological future; this culmination “will include Israel’s
restoration to the land, final judgment and an eschatological reversal” (120, and ch. 2). Yet the kingdom as both present and future is, according to Smith, “hypothetical,” by which he means that it “is conditional upon its acceptance and the acceptance of its messenger” (1). Thus, other teachings about the kingdom that presuppose the kingdom’s “rejection … by the majority of Jews and especially the Jewish authorities” are best understood as originating in a different context in Jesus’ ministry. These teachings spell out the consequences of this rejection: judgment on the nation, especially Jerusalem, but also the continuing progress of the kingdom for a “believing remnant from Israel”; the offer of the kingdom to Gentiles; and Jesus’ own death, which he now interprets “as part of his mission” (185, and ch. 3). The book also contains a bibliography of secondary sources (273–95), a “selective” index of references to ancient texts (296–305), and an index of modern authors (306–12).

In general the book is very well written and exhaustively researched, even if all interaction with secondary literature is consigned to the very lengthy footnotes (this was done “to keep the text uncluttered and as easy to read as possible,” 2). In addition, certain difficult texts or expressions are discussed in excurses following the main part of the relevant chapters (for instance, the meaning of ἐγγίζω is treated at length in excursus 1, 110–13). Smith tends to group his discussion of the relevant texts according to theme: so, for instance, in chapter 1, “The Time Has Arrived” treats Mark 1:15 (not 1:14, as noted on p. 3), Matt 13:16–17 par. Luke 10:23–24, and Luke 4:13–21 (3–16); or in chapter 3, “Jesus’ Condemnation of His Contemporaries” discusses Luke 5:39, Matt 11:16–19 par. Luke 7:31–35, Matt 23:34–36 par. Luke 11:49–51, Matt 16:2–3 par. Luke 12:54–56, Matt 12:41–42 par. Luke 11:31–32, and Matt 7:13–14 par. Luke 13:22–24 (186–98). Thus Smith, in terms of his presentation of the material at least, does not separate out the three Synoptics in his discussions of the relevant material. In fact, Smith tends not to differentiate between the Synoptics but seems to view all three, including the Double Tradition material (which Smith does not think comes from a hypothetical Q source), as providing more or less immediate access to the words and views of Jesus himself. This approach is not explained in the introductory parts of the book (perhaps an opening section on methodology would have made the book too unwieldy?), but it becomes apparent to the reader as the discussion unfolds.

Generally Smith is very hesitant to see any major redactional activity in the texts he discusses. A couple of examples will illustrate this. First, Smith takes Luke 7:36–50 (79–84) as evidence for the view that Jesus saw himself as “mediator of eschatological forgiveness” (76–84). In three lengthy footnotes, Smith insists (1) that Luke did not create this episode on the basis of the similar anointing story in Mark 14:3–9 (79 n. 293), (2) that he did not add or create any of the details in the pericope (79–80 n. 294), and (3) that Luke did not create the episode by conflating two originally separate traditions (81 n.
In these footnotes the historical value of the passage seems to be the primary concern: to the first possibility, Smith says “on this assumption, only the parable [Luke 7:41–43] would have any claim to authenticity” (79 n. 293); to the second, Smith objects that “this would mean that at least some of the narrative is inauthentic” (79 n. 294); to the third, “this would mean that Luke’s version is historically inaccurate” (81 n. 295). As to the creation of Luke 7:36–50 by the Evangelist on the basis of Mark 14:3–9, Smith remarks that “this would mean that Luke took a tradition from his Markan tradition, heavily redacted it and relocated it outside of the passion narrative. In other words, he would have handled his Markan source in a most uncharacteristic manner” (79 n. 293). Yet Luke in fact did seem to do this more than once elsewhere: one may compare Mark 6:17–29 with Luke 3:19–20, Mark 6:1–6 with Luke 4:16–30, or Mark 10:41–45 with Luke 22:24–27 (though perhaps these might be disputed). Smith also says that, when Luke had available “two similar but not identical narratives,” he usually chose the non-Markan version (79 n. 293). This, of course, only assumes that there were two different anointing stories available to Luke, both of which were historically accurate, and that Luke chose the non-Markan story.

Second, and this relates to his general skepticism regarding Q, Smith holds that the “House Abandoned” saying (Matt 23:37–39 par. Luke 13:34–35) was not from Q despite the “substantial verbatim agreement” (200) between Matthew and Luke. In the introduction, Smith states that, “although Markan priority is assumed in this investigation, the hypothesis of the Q-source is not” (2), but does not explain any further. Smith allows that the differences (they are quite minor) between the two versions of the saying can be put down to the editorial work of the two Evangelists (200–201 nn. 64–65). But how can one explain the similarities between Matthew and Luke in this pericope, given that they are extensive verbatim similarities in Greek? By my count, Matthew and Luke agree in forty-six words in this saying, forty-eight if ἐπισυναγαγεῖν and ἐπισυνάξαι and νοσσία and νοσσίῶν be considered close enough to call verbatim. The longest string is fourteen words in a row, precisely the same and in the same order in Matt 23:37 and Luke 13:34: Ἑρωσταλήμ Ἑρωσταλῆμ, ἡ ἀποκτείνουσα τοὺς προφήτας καὶ λιθοβολοῦσα τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους πρὸς αὐτήν, ποσάκις ἠθέλησα. One would think that some kind of literary solution is absolutely necessary to explain this phenomenon, whether this be Luke’s use of Matthew (in the Two-Gospel Hypothesis or the Farrer-Goulder Hypothesis), or the independent use of another source by Luke and Matthew (the Two-Document Hypothesis). One needs to look elsewhere in Smith’s footnotes to discover the reason for his reluctance to follow the Q hypothesis: concerning a related saying, Matt 23:34–36 par. Luke 11:49–51, he says, “The view that Matthew and Luke had access to a common written source, the Q-source, is less credible [than the view that Matt 23:34–36 and Luke 11:49–51 are “independent condensations of a longer discourse of Jesus”] because it
requires the assumption of major redactional activity that is not consistent with a conservative handling of the words of Jesus” (191 n. 16, emphasis added). But on what basis may it be assumed that the handling of the words of Jesus (in the oral tradition and then by the Evangelists) was essentially “conservative”? The book contains no detailed explanation why such an approach is warranted. For Smith, the solution in both situations—the agreement of Matthew and Luke in the Double Tradition, and the existence of similar but distinct episodes in different contexts in the Gospels—is to claim that both the Evangelists and the traditions on which they relied preserve, essentially without distortion, the words and views of Jesus (as in Matt 23:37–39 par. Luke 13:34–35, or in Luke 7:36–50), as well as the details of his ministry.

Yet in principle Smith’s thesis is sound and worth considering. The idea that Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God may have developed over the course of his ministry or may have been adapted to different contexts generally seems more probable than the alternative, that Jesus did not modify or adapt his use of the metaphor. The reader infers, however, on the basis of Smith’s handling of the sources, that what is problematic about the alternative is the possibility that where Jesus’ perspectives apparently diverge, this is to be put down entirely to developments in the tradition or to the theological perspectives of the Evangelists or their sources. In other words, what seems to be at stake is the historical reliability of the Gospels. In addition, as the reader follows Smith through his discussion of the relevant texts, it becomes clear that the central thesis of the book is treated less as a hypothesis to be tested and more as an overarching framework into which all of the Synoptic materials about the kingdom of God can be fit. Materials that describe the kingdom as present, as future, and as occasioning separation and judgment all fit into this framework. In other words, Smith’s presentation works very well as an exposition of all of the Synoptic materials about the kingdom.

Thus, readers expecting a treatment of the material more in keeping with the criteria and methods, and with the generally more critical textual approach, typical of historical Jesus research will do well to look elsewhere. This not to say that such approaches are unproblematic, of course: dissatisfaction with the standard criteria of authenticity and with the unrealistic views about oral tradition and scribal activity on which they are based is evident in recent publications on Jesus and the Jesus traditions. In fact, the book and its presentation might have been significantly different had there been some serious engagement with recent work on orality and scribal practices or (more especially) on memory. Recent studies approach “memory” not as the ability of an individual to recall an event or saying accurately but as a social process involving individual and communal perception, interpretation, as well as recollection and deployment. Memory understood as straightforwardly as the faculty of recall introduces an artificial division between remembered facts and invented (or misremembered) nonfacts. Several important works
along these lines could be mentioned, but I note only Alan K. Kirk and Tom Thatcher, eds., *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (SemeiaSt 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

These reservations notwithstanding, Smith has at least raised an important possibility, that Jesus may have thought and taught about the kingdom in different ways in different situations, and he has provided a clear exposition of how the relevant texts could fit into such a framework.