

Genesis 29–31 thus counterpoint the surrounding tale of Esau. Indeed, on reading Genesis 29 . . . one has the distinct sense of déjà vu. The agon of Jacob in pursuit of Rachel, of Rachel in contest with Leah, of Jacob deceived by Laban, and of Laban deceived by Rachel: all mirror the preceding strife between Jacob and Esau and the former's deception of Isaac. By such a foil, moreover, the final formulator of the cycle gives Jacob his comeuppance and circumspectly redresses the injustice of his original act of deceit (in Genesis 27). When Jacob fulfils the serf tenure which Laban has demanded (apparently as a brideprice) for Rachel, but is given Leah in her stead, he reproaches Laban, 'his brother': 'Why have you deceived me [stem: rimmah, 29:25]?' To which Laban rejoins (v. 26): 'It is not our [local] custom to marry off the younger [tze'irah] before the firstborn [bekhirah]'. The counterpoint with Genesis 27 is obvious: there Jacob was the younger (tza'ir/qaton) who misappropriated the birthright (bekhorah) of his elder brother . . . by deception (stem: rimmah, 27:35). With his indignant protest to Laban, Jacob unwittingly condemns himself. (p. 55)

Among numerous other helpful insights in this vein, his chiasmic outline of the Jacob cycle (Gen 25:19–35:22; p. 43) and his explanation of the passage where God appears in order to slay Moses (4:24–26; p. 71) are particularly noteworthy.

Several positive features commend this work. Fishbane's sensitivity to stylistic conventions will prove very instructive to those unfamiliar with a literary reading of biblical texts, as well as those only nominally familiar. Moreover, each chapter contains numerous helpful insights into the passage or cycle or motif that he writes on, especially with regard to thematic repetition, and, to a more limited extent, the psychology of the players in the passages (though this at times goes too far). As well, while acknowledging tensions in the text, Fishbane emphasises the unity of the material, allowing him to concentrate on the meaning(s) latent in the text as it stands before us, an emphasis which has at times been neglected in the era of form and source criticism. Further, and perhaps more basically, Fishbane does hold that there is meaning in the text, and that that meaning is discernible to the reader, a point on which many today would disagree.

As mentioned above, Fishbane's work is primarily practical in its approach with theoretical comments restricted primarily to the four page introduction and two page epilogue. Those wanting a more theoretical discussion will have to go elsewhere. On a more

foundational level, it is especially important for evangelicals to note that literary readings such as Fishbane's—which we sometimes adopt in order to focus on the final form of the text—are based on a distinction between the 'literary reality' of the text and the experiential or historical reality external to it. Carried to its logical conclusion, such a distinction divorces history from the text. This in turn undermines the authority of the Bible as an accurate representation of the historical reality of God's acting in and redeeming the world. On a minor note, there is a mistake in the verse alignment in line three of the chart on the bottom of p. 68, and p. 72 should read 5:22ff (not 6:22ff) in the second paragraph.

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Civil Society, Civil Religion

A. Shanks

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur veut montrer que la théologie confessionnelle ne parvient pas à fournir une vision commune susceptible d'unir notre société post-chrétienne. Il propose de la remplacer par ce qu'il présente comme une 'théologie civile'. Il s'agit d'un cadre spirituel large, qui peut être également partagé par des croyants et des non croyants. Il passe en revue une série de tentatives modernistes pour arriver à une théologie civile en s'inspirant de la pensée de Hegel qui est jugée très favorablement. L'argumentaire nous laisse insatisfait pour deux raisons. Premièrement, pour éviter les vérités exclusives de la théologie confessionnelle, la théologie civile de Shanks demeure tellement indéfinie qu'elle est vide de contenu. Deuxièmement, Shanks n'aborde pas la question de la signification de la christologie, qui fait du christianisme une foi exclusive des autres. Au vu de cette carence, l'argumentation laisse intacte ce qui fait la force de la théologie confessionnelle.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Shanks stellt die Behauptung auf, daß die konfessionelle Theologie nicht in der Lage ist, eine einheitliche Vision hervorzubringen, die unsere nachchristliche Gesellschaft

zusammenzuhalten vermag. Seine Alternative besteht in einer "zivilen Theologie". Dabei handelt es sich um ein allgemeines geistliches Rahmenmodell, das sowohl Gläubigen als auch Nichtgläubigen offensteht. Shanks untersucht eine Reihe von modernistischen Versuchen, eine zivile Theologie zu entwickeln, und ist sehr aufgeschlossen für Hegels Konzeptionen. Dieser Rezensent ist mit seiner Argumentation nicht zufrieden, und zwar aus zwei Gründen. Erstens bleibt Shanks zivile Theologie, die dem Wunsch entsprungen ist, die exklusiven Wahrheiten der konfessionellen Theologie hinter sich zu lassen, so unbestimmt, daß sie praktisch inhaltslos ist. Zweitens setzt sich Shanks nicht mit der Bedeutung der Christologie für den christlichen Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch auseinander. Dieser Mangel an Auseinandersetzung hat zur Folge, daß seine Argumentation nicht in der Lage ist, den Standpunkt der konfessionellen Theologen zu untergraben.

Andrew Shanks sets himself a noble task in this work. He is concerned that in the post-Christian west the peaceful coexistence of its population can no longer be maintained on the basis of a common religious confession. He believes that in modern pluralist society confessional theology is too exclusive to provide a common vision. In its place, Shanks develops what he describes as a 'civil' theology. This implies a loyalty beyond ones own confession 'to whatever makes for genuine openness within the surrounding political culture'. (p. 2) Thus a myriad of denominations or secular world-views may clash at the level of confessional loyalty but still share in a common civil religion. The argument of the book surveys the need for such a framework and traces its contours in the work of a number of twentieth century thinkers. His writing is both stimulating and wideranging.

Civil theology provides a context for solidarity and shared ideals among both believers and non-believers. Shanks affirms that commitment to such a civil theology is entirely compatible with confessional theology—so long as the latter does not claim 'exclusive access to the truth'. (p. 4) It might be pointed out that there is already a reigning secular ideology in which confessional religions exist side by side. Shanks is not happy with secularism because he sees a need for a spiritual grounding to any public ideology. Civil religion offers a positive solidarity among religious and non-religious people because it is not hostile to such a spiritual dimension.

The impetus for Shanks' argument is his conviction that the twentieth century has received fresh revelation. The Third Reich looms large in his thought as the voice of revelation concerning the perils of totalitarianism. Learning from this 'revelation', Shanks wants a civil religion that is able both to affirm pluralism as a positive virtue and retain the spiritual dimension. He finds anticipations of such an ideal in Machiavelli, Spinoza, Rousseau and, most importantly for Shanks, Hegel. He deals with opposition to this tradition as it is found in the work of Barth and Kierkegaard.

It is difficult to identify in Shanks' work what content civil theology should have. Presumably, being a 'theology', one might expect at least a deistic commitment to a supreme being but this does not fit his desire that it should incorporate both theist and atheist (p. 115). Given the significance he attaches to the rise of Nazism as a revelatory event one would expect a theology that can identify the character of revelation and delineate what authority it should have. However, this also is missing. Revelation is whatever citizens with an Hegelian sense of history discern as significant (p. 138). Instead of offering the content of civil theology, Shanks outlines the kind of attitude it represents. This attitude is the commitment to three virtues: free-spiritedness, a flair for tradition and generosity. These virtues all amount to an ability to transcend one's own commitments and assumptions in order to experience solidarity with others. While not wishing to dispute the value of such a virtue it does not contribute any positive content to what the civil theologian ought to believe.

Shanks pursues his argument with detailed reference to such thinkers as Hegel, Heidegger and Nietzsche but with little attempt to understand what makes confessional theology so strident in its objection to modernity. Absent in his work is any discussion of Christology and its implications for revelation, authority and loyalty. Furthermore, there is no attempt to engage with historical attempts of confessional groups, such as the Reformers or Puritans, to provide a comprehensive vision of society. He chides the confessional Barmen declaration in its stand against Nazism for its failure to offer solidarity with the Jews. Nonetheless, surely this practical application of confessional theology compares favourably against Heidegger's flirtation with National Socialism? One is left with the sense that the strength and appeal of a confessional approach to pluralist society has not been done justice. Indeed, Shanks

seems to equate exclusive loyalty to a confession with exclusion of the possibility of human solidarity. There is no reason to make such an equation. Exclusive loyalty to the Christian confession provides the basis for a solidarity of the human race who are all created in the image of God and all sinners in need of redemption. The failure to explore such possibilities seems to stem from his failure to consider the significance of Christology in the confessional theology he rejects.

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***The Historical Jesus: A
Comprehensive Guide***

G. Theissen and A. Merz

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre, destiné aux étudiants, se veut un manuel complet sur la vie et l'enseignement de Jésus. Son approche est plus près de celle de E. P. Sanders que, par exemple, de celle de J. D. Crossan, et il se tient ainsi à la droite du courant principal de la critique. Il est en fait remarquablement conservateur dans son approche des guérisons miraculeuses et de la résurrection. Il présente des aspects de la christologie qui sont implicites, simplement évoqués, ou exposés explicitement dans l'action et l'enseignement de Jésus, et qui ont fourni son fondement à la christologie de l'Église primitive. Le livre est parfaitement approprié pour des étudiants d'un niveau plus avancé.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das vorliegende Buch ist als umfassendes Textbuch für Studenten des Lebens und der Lehre Jesu gedacht. Sein Ansatz steht dem von E. P. Sanders näher als z.B. dem von J. D. Crossan, d.h. das Buch ist eher rechts vom Hauptstrom der kritischen Forschung angesiedelt. Es ist in der Tat erstaunlich konservativ in seiner Behandlung der Heilungswunder und der Auferstehung, und es geht Teilaspekten der Christologie nach, die in den Taten und der Lehre Jesu entweder implizit, in Form von Anspielungen oder gar explizit enthalten sind und die das Fundament bildeten, ohne das sich die Christologie der frühen Kirche nicht hätte entwickeln können.

Das Buch ist auch für fortgeschrittene Studenten bestens geeignet.

Gerd Theissen is well-known as one of the most creative New Testament scholars in Germany today. He and his collaborator, Annette Merz, who also teaches in Heidelberg, have produced what is intended as a guidebook and workbook for students. The authors believe that the question of the historical Jesus is theologically important (vii). They place themselves on the map of New Testament scholarship by distinguishing between what they call the Californian Jesus of J. D. Crossan and B. L. Mack and the Galilean Jesus of E. P. Sanders, with which they find more sympathy. In the first part of their book they offer a detailed evaluation of the historical sources, listing and responding to thirteen objections to the historicity of the Jesus-tradition. They criticise the traditional criteria for evaluating the tradition and argue instead for a criterion of 'plausibility' which asks: 'what is plausible in the Jewish context and makes the rise of Christianity understandable' (11)?

The second part of the book is concerned with background and chronology. The aim is to see Jesus in the context of the Judaism of his time and to avoid the allegedly anti-Semitic understandings of Judaism which are found in some modern writers.

In Part Three the authors look at the activity and preaching of Jesus. They see Jesus as a charismatic in the sociological sense of that term, thus joining forces with G. Bornkamm, M. Hengel, G. Vermes and M. J. Borg, who in their various ways emphasised the sheer authority of Jesus. Jesus is not unknown, as Bultmann claimed, but is known in his relationships with other people, about which we have a reasonable amount of information.

His message was about the kingdom of God. Both present and future statements are accepted as part of the message, but Jesus erroneously expected an imminent end to the world. As for his miracles, they reject those which have no analogies in experience (walking on the water, multiplying loaves) but accept those which do, namely the healings which are attributed to paranormal gifts such as are found in the modern world.

A distinction is drawn between the understanding of the parables as a sacrament of the word and as symbolic pointers to God, 'images which give people freedom to discover how far they disclose their content' (344), and they defend the latter understanding in which the parables 'aim to give impulses towards