

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**

London: SCM Press, 1998, xxix + 642 pp., £25, pb, ISBN 0-33402696-2

#### **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'Eglise 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



thinking of God in constantly new and different ways' (345).

The discussion of ethics is particularly interesting for the way in which Theissen's earlier interpretation of the ethic of Jesus 'as the expression of a radical itinerant charismatic life' is compared with other possible views and held to be relevant for the whole of society and not just for those who choose to live on the margin.

In Part Four the Lord's Supper is seen as a replacement for the temple ritual, but the interpretation in terms of Jesus' death as a sacrifice took place only after the event. With respect to the Passion the authors largely agree with R. E. Brown. Jesus is depicted as an innocent, suffering, righteous man. Finally, there is a discussion of the resurrection. They contrast the objective theories of Pannenberg and the subjective theories of Lüdemann. They firmly accept the historicity of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples as a group. They also believe that he appeared to Mary Magdalene. They do not think that the story of the empty tomb can be proved or falsified, but seem to lean towards acceptance.

But the book is not yet concluded, and the story so far is followed by a section on the beginnings of Christology. A distinction is made between five ways in which christology may have a basis in the historical Jesus: a. explicit christology, where Jesus expressed his authority with a title; b. evoked christology, in which Jesus raised expectations among other people in his lifetime; c. implicit christology, in which Jesus fulfilled the 'conditions' of being Messiah without using the title; d. a heightened use of titles, in which the church gave titles used by Jesus a more transcendent claim; e. an exclusivist use of titles, in which the early church restricted to Jesus titles under which he included others, such as a collective use of Son of man or messiah. Only categories a. and c. give a real basis for christology in the historical Jesus. Implicit christology is seen in the Amen formula, the 'I' sayings and the 'I have come' sayings; the metaphor of God as Father, the granting of forgiveness, the causal attribution of the miracles and the assessment of John the Baptist. Evoked christology is seen in the assessment of Jesus as Messiah, a title which Jesus himself did not use although he had a messianic consciousness. Explicit christology is to be seen in the use of Son of man. 'An

everyday expression which simply meant the human being or a human being was evaluated in "messianic" terms by Jesus. Only because of that could it become the characteristic way in which he described himself'. The cross and Easter transformed this expectation, and the titles of Son of God and Lord developed as a result.

Readers may well be surprised by the sheer conservatism of the conclusions reached in this book. But while it is remarkably traditional in its conclusions, it is based on a very careful, critical analysis of the evidence. It lacks the originality of N. T. Wright's reconstruction of *Jesus and the Victory of God*, and it demonstrates that one can defend an essentially orthodox picture of Jesus without resorting to any unusual hypotheses to do so.

At the same time, the book is intended not simply to present the authors' conclusions but to be a comprehensive workbook for students. It is organised in brief sections in which different viewpoints are laid out side by side and evaluated. The language is simple and clear. At various points 'exercises', often based on cited texts, are set for the reader and 'solutions' are supplied at the end of the book. The scholarship addressed is largely but by no means exclusively German; the sectional bibliographies were adapted for English-speaking readers. The result is a book which is far too detailed for a beginning student but which would be suitable for students at a more advanced level. In a book of this kind, which is concerned to analyse different approaches to the problems, it is most surprising that an index of modern authors is lacking.

Of the various books on the historical Jesus currently available this one is probably the best suited for its intended purpose, namely as a textbook which can be consulted on virtually every aspect of the subject and as a guide to the different approaches and conclusions of contemporary scholars. One does not have to go along with all the judgments of the authors (e.g. their overcritical attitude to some of the material in the Gospels) in order to recognise the value of this book as a stimulus to study of the historical Jesus, and one can only rejoice that the historical Jesus is once again the subject of serious study among New Testament scholars.

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