

De Ignorantia Christi: Zur Parusieverzögerung in den synoptischen Evangelien

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SUMMARY

Finnish scholar Timo Laato addresses three verses (Matt. 10.23; Mk 9.1; 13.30) which are crucial to the study of the eschatology of Jesus and the Gospels. The central argument is that it is not possible to say that Jesus was *mistaken* in his eschatological expectation. Laato argues that Matt. 10.23 is a "mission" saying, rather than being centred on persecution; Mk 9.1 refers primarily to the transfiguration; and the "all things" in Mk 13.30 are the initial signs of the end, including the destruction of Jerusalem.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der finnische Forscher Timo Laato beschäftigt sich mit drei Versen (Matt. 10,23; Mk 9,1; 13,30), die für das Studium der Eschatologie Jesu und der Evangelien entscheidend wichtig sind. Das Hauptargument lautet, dass es nicht möglich ist zu sagen, Jesu eschatologische Erwartung sei falsch gewesen. Laato versteht Matt. 10,23 als „Missionsspruch“, nicht als auf Verfolgung zentriert; Mk 9,1 als primär auf die Verklärung bezogen; und das „alle Dinge“ von Mk 13,30 als auf die anfänglichen Zeichen des Endes bezogen, inklusive der Zerstörung Jerusalems.

RÉSUMÉ

Le théologien finlandais Timo Laato, se penche sur trois versets qui ont une importance cruciale pour la compréhension de l'eschatologie de Jésus et des Évangiles (Mt 10.23 ; Mc 9.1 ; 13.30). Sa thèse centrale est qu'il est impossible de dire que Jésus s'est trompé quant à son attente eschatologique. Il s'efforce de montrer que le premier texte n'a pas pour thème central la persécution, mais qu'il a trait à la mission. Le deuxième se réfère principalement, selon lui, à la transfiguration. Quant à « toutes ces choses » dont il est question dans le troisième, il s'agit des signes initiaux de la fin, ce qui inclut la destruction de Jérusalem.

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In his famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer based his understanding of Jesus on the assumption that the Gospels (especially Matthew) were broadly historically reliable. The centrepiece of his reconstruction of Jesus' eschatological message (and Schweitzer saw Jesus' preaching as eschatological through and through) was the view that Jesus sent his disciples out into the towns of Israel with the expectation that their suffering on this mission would precipitate the end: 'I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes' (Matt. 10:23). Alongside this passage, there are other references which scholars generally take to refer to Jesus' imminent expectation of the final consummation of the Kingdom, such as the statements that his hearers would not die before

witnessing certain events which he foretold (Mark 9:1; Mark 13:30).

It is these three verses (Matt. 10:23; Mark 9:1; 13:30) which the Finnish scholar Timo Laato tackles in this brief study of the eschatology of Jesus and the Gospels. His attempt does not, he writes, have a 'hidden agenda' of attempting to establish the historical truth of the Gospels in every detail (13); nevertheless, the end result, he claims, is that at the very least it is not possible to say that the Jesus of the Gospels was *mistaken* in his eschatological expectation (84).

Taking Matthew 10:23 first, Laato concludes that the verse cannot (as many scholars now agree) bear the weight which Schweitzer laid upon it. Laato takes the saying about the disciples not exhausting the towns of Israel as referring primarily to the disciples' mission, and that it will not be complete before the coming of the Son of Man. Although this might encourage anticipation of an imminent *parousia*, he continues, it certainly does not exclude a more distant expectation of the end (28–29). Thus, the point Jesus makes is that only at the very end will the salvation of Israel be complete (leaving open the question of how it will be accomplished). Although this reviewer prefers the interpretation that Jesus is here reassuring the disciples that they will always have a place of refuge in the towns of Israel, Laato's reading is certainly a plausible one, which would safeguard the infallibility of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' teaching in Mark 9:1, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power', is the focus of Laato's second exegetical study. In this he argues that the reference is to the transfiguration which immediately follows. The point of the expression that 'some standing here will not taste death' is thus that the inner circle of Peter, James and John (the 'some') will actually witness in their present lives (i.e. before 'tasting death') the glory of Christ which others will only see after their deaths. Laato is right to observe, following Cranfield and others, that this is by far the most convincing exegesis of the saying and the transfiguration pericope which follows.

In terms of Mark 13:30 ('this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened'), Laato ties the 'all these things' most closely to the initial signs (which include the destruction of Jerusalem) of the last days. Thus he answers the question of the reliability of the statement by focusing on the point that Jesus' listeners will witness the birthpangs which precede the end, rather than the end itself.

In all this, however, Laato presents a picture, more complex than this review has so far implied. He anchors a good deal of his discussion in the fact that many of the statements about future expectation in the NT (and, for that matter, in the OT) have a calculated ambiguity. (Laato outlines this in his initial section on 15–22.) So for example, it is too simplistic to say that the transfiguration is an isolated event; rather it inevitably overlaps in some way with the resurrection and the *parousia*. As

a result, the self-confessed ignorance of Jesus, expressed in Mark 13:32 about the date of the end (hence the Latin title of the book) means that he expresses himself in a way that raises the possibility of an imminent end, while leaving open the eventuality that it might also be more distant. As a result, the warnings to 'stay awake' are equally relevant to Jesus' initial hearers, to the audiences of the gospels, and to us today.

This is a very useful book, although it will be inaccessible to many British and American students because it is in German. Unfortunately, it may prove difficult for continental students to find this as it is published by a small Finnish press. Many English-language readers may find many of the key issues on this vital topic addressed in a similar way in C.E.B. Cranfield's works: see for example his commentary on Mark (Cambridge, 1959), and the essay 'Thoughts on New Testament Eschatology', in his *The Bible and Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1985).

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L'évangile selon saint Luc 15,1-19,27

François Bovon

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SUMMARY

The third volume of F. Bovon's major French commentary is characterized by clarity of presentation; literary and theological sensitivity; careful attention to the history of interpretation of the Gospel as well as to contemporary scholarship; and a sense of the importance of the biblical text for the modern Christian community. It is weakened at certain points by Bovon's unwillingness to accept that all the material attributed to Jesus derives from the historical Jesus which necessarily leads him to rather speculative source- and redaction-critical reconstructions. Generally, however, Bovon is willing to wrestle with the text as it stands.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der dritte Band von F. Bovons großem französischen Kommentar zeichnet sich durch folgende Charakteristika aus: Klarheit der Präsentation, literarische und theologische Sensibilität, sorgfältige Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber der Auslegungsgeschichte des Evangelium und der gegenwärtigen Forschung, und einem Sinn für die Wichtigkeit des biblischen Textes für die moderne christliche Gemeinde. Eine Schwäche, die hier und da zutage tritt, besteht in Bovons Unwilligkeit, alles Jesus zugesprochene Material als vom historischen Jesus stammend zu akzeptieren, was ihn notwendigerweise zu recht spekulativen quellen- und redaktionskritischen Rekonstruktionen führt. Im allgemeinen ist Bovon aber willens, mit dem Text in der Form zu arbeiten, in der er gegeben ist.

RÉSUMÉ

Le troisième volume du commentaire majeur de François

Bovon sur l'Évangile de Luc se signale par la clarté de sa présentation, sa sensibilité littéraire et théologique, son attention à l'histoire de l'interprétation de l'Évangile, en même temps qu'aux travaux contemporains. Il a aussi le sens de l'importance du texte biblique pour la communauté chrétienne d'aujourd'hui. Son point faible réside dans le refus de Bovon d'accepter la valeur historique de certains des faits et gestes, ou des propos, attribués à Jésus. Cela le conduit à échafauder, à l'aide des méthodes de la critique des sources et de la critique rédactionnelle, des reconstructions au caractère plutôt spéculatif. En général, cependant, Bovon accepte de traiter le texte tel qu'il se présente.

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François Bovon is Professor of New Testament at Harvard Divinity School, having previously taught at the University of Geneva for many years. Bovon has already published on Luke, including a respected history of interpretation. This is the third volume of Bovon's major four-volume commentary, the first volume of which was published (in German) in 1989. It is being published in both German and French, and the first volume has now been translated into English in the Hermeneia series (2002).

The format of the commentary is very user-friendly. Each major section begins with relevant bibliography, which augments the general bibliography found at the beginning of each volume. Bovon's bibliographies are extensive (for example, more than five pages of specific studies on the parable of the Unjust Steward alone) and generally representative of Lukan scholarship, including a good number of evangelical works.

A French translation of the Greek text is provided. This appears to be a fresh translation by the author although I could find no explicit declaration that this is the case. (No doubt, some of these fundamental matters are dealt with in the first volume of the commentary.) Brief annotations indicate how the translation relates to the underlying Greek text.

Bovon divides his comment into 'analyse' and 'explication'. In the former section he considers issues relating to literary context, parallel passages, etc.. In the latter section Bovon explains the words and phrases of the unit of text and draws out theological significance. The comments are written in clear prose and are arranged in paragraphs which relate to units of thought (whether composed of a single verse or a group of verses). Bovon writes with a light touch which makes the commentary more readable than many.

Scholarly discussion is addressed, but not in an overpowering way. Most of the main body of the commentary deals with features of the biblical text, with only occasional reference to scholarly views. While the footnotes often simply convey bibliographical information, there are also some substantial comments on scholarship.

Bovon indicates in his Preface that he became more