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Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord

A Review Article

By DAVID P. SCAER

JESUS OF NAZARETH: SAVIOR AND LORD. Edited by Carl F. H. Henry. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966. Price \$5.95.

JUST HOW historical was the person whom the church reveres as Jesus Christ? This is a question that might appear strange to the Lutheran cleric in our country but is a familiar concept to our German counterparts. Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, the well known editor of *Christianity Today* has assembled sixteen scholars to present and defend the traditional ecclesiastical position that Jesus was the Christ and that this fact is well attested by an historically reliable New Testament.

The separation of Jesus Christ into two individual persons, "the Jesus of history" and "the Christ of faith or preaching" has been for the most part a European phenomenon, confining itself to a large degree to Germany, the land of its birth. But with the modern speed of translation, even the American theological world with its strong practical bent has been infected with this German scholarly disease. Those already acquainted with this German type of "Nestorianism" will immediately recognize Henry's purpose from the title of the symposium. The selection of scholars from different denominations in all parts of the world is a legitimate ecumenical touch showing both the universal and scholarly concern for an adequate defense and presentation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Since the heart of the Gospel, the person of Jesus Christ, is at stake, even the theologically unconcerned cannot refuse to remain unconcerned any longer. These sixteen scholars state the problems and provide biblical answers based on the best possible scholarship. They are unanimously opposed to the separation of Jesus Christ into the Rabbi from Nazareth and the "Christ" whose existence and resurrection are confined to the tradition and preaching of the early church, far removed from the historical milieu of this world.

The lead article "Cross-Currents in Contemporary Theology" by Dr. Henry traces briefly the course of theology from the Rationalistic Liberalism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Troeltsch through Karl Barth's dialectical method to Rudolf Bultmann's existential theology. The one theological question is whether or not to go one step further than Bultmann, completely removing religion from the realm of the historical. This radical subjectivism suggested by Panenberg of Mainz is opposed by Edmund Schlink and Peter Brunner of Heidelberg, who continue to assert the historical objectivity of the Christian revelation.

"The New Quest for the Historical Jesus" by Dr. Ralph P. Martin of the University of Manchester, England, summarizes the past and present results of this search. Formerly the low point was reached with Albert Schweizer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* where Jesus was described as an apocalyptic visionary and the deluded victim of a fixed eschatological program. Today this position is prominently occupied by Bultmann who will hardly assert more than that Jesus was. Others like Conzelmann and Ogden wanting to "out-Bultmann Bultmann" believe their teacher to be too conservative (!) in believing that Jesus lived.

The Swedish Lutheran scholar Birger Gerhardsson of the University of Lund takes a practical direction in his essay "The Authenticity and Authority of Revelation", proposing that the church let her message change the world and not the reverse. The church is unique because of the apostolic authority and to label this as *Frühkatholizismus*, as the demythologizers do, is to remove salvation from the historical. Her task is to go into the world and find the lost. She dare not leave them in the world, "but she must lead (them) to a shelter that is more secure than the rocky road with its haunts of robbers." Dr. Gerhardsson's remarks are intended for those theologians who believe the church should be amalgamated into society and culture, loosing her unique identity as a special instrument of salvation.

Professor Adolf Köberle of Tübingen, known for his *Quest for Holiness*, pleads with the church in his essay "Jesus Christ, The Center of History" "to overcome the nonhistorical trend of thought which, as our present age discloses all too clearly, constantly seeks to dominate not only philosophy but also theology." Faith can only function in history when based on Jesus Christ who changed history.

Dr. R. Laird Harris of Covenant Seminary, St. Louis, compares the eschatological consciousness of the early church with the Qumram community in "The Last Days in the Bible and Qumram." The early Christians did not believe that theirs was the "eschatological" community. They were not unlike Christians today for whom the messianic and eschatological kingdom is still a future promise and not a present reality.

F. F. Bruce, the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester, England, looks at the person of Jesus with more of the typical New Testament critical apparatus in his essay "History and Gospel." He disparges all attempts to consider the person or mission of Jesus as political. Our Lord's attitude to the tragically mistaken Zealots and His words during his arrest and trial clearly show that his motives were other than political. The Jesus of the New Testament is the "representative man (who) accomplishes for others what they are unable to accomplish for themselves, taking His people's sins in death upon Himself and by that very act taking them away."

Dr. Bastiann Van Elderen, New Testament Professor at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan, discusses the proper understand-

ing of the widely used phrase *Sitz im Leben* in his essay "The Teaching of Jesus and the Gospel Records." The original situation, *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, is distinguished from the writer's interpretation of it, *Sitz im Leben des Verfassers*. While the Gospels are not a mere chronicling of the events of Jesus' life, they do contain the actual history of real events applied to the needs of the early church.

Just how historical is the "least historical" Gospel, is the problem tackled by Leon Morris, an Australian Anglican theologian in the essay "The Fourth Gospel and History." The Synoptic Gospels are given more historical weight by the scholars, with John's Gospel considered as a theological treatise. In very detailed work, relying both on the text of John and such scholars as C. H. Dodd and H. Riesenfeld, Morris makes a good case for the historical reliability of this Gospel. Its words, rather than being merely a late theological interpretation of the church, can be traced directly to the inner circle of the disciples where Jesus in the custom of the rabbis had his students commit them to memory.

The historical reality of Jesus' resurrection is discussed in two essays, "The History of the Resurrection" by Merrill C. Tenney of Wheaton College in Illinois and "On The Third Day" by Clark H. Pinnock of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. On the basis of historical testimony Tenney argues for the actuality of the resurrection belonging "to a world dimension different from ours, although it did occur within the bounds of time and space." In regard to the Easter narratives he says they cannot "be dismissed as legendary embroidery created by a credulous community, for something happened to overcome the initial skepticism of the apostles to account for the origin of the resurrection story." The article by Pinnock is directed more precisely towards Bultmann and Tillich with their symbolical views of the resurrection, making faith the "creator" of the resurrection rather than its receiver.

"*Gemeindetheologie*: The Bane of Gospel Criticism" by Dr. Everett F. Harrison takes up the central issue of whether or not Jesus spoke and acted as the Gospels record. The term *Gemeindetheologie* is that theory that makes the figure of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels the "front man" for the theological opinions of the early church. One is almost tempted to rephrase "the voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's" into "the voice is the church's, but the hands are Jesus'." Harris's brilliant presentation shows that in the Gospels both hands and voice belong to Jesus. Some embarrassing questions are asked of those who hold to the theory of *Gemeindetheologie*. Why did the early church permit their fabricated Jesus to say that He did not know the time of His return (Mark 13:32)? Why are the Gospels so full of parables, while almost lacking in the literature of the early church? Why are the passion narratives virtually devoid of theological interpretation, even though the epistles interpret the events? How can you explain the absence of any reflection of the Gentile problem in the Gospels, even though this was the bane of the early church? These are problems for those who accept the

dichotomous "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith", not for those who "believe in one Lord Jesus Christ."

Dr. James P. Martin of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, inseparably connects faith to the historical reality (*Heilsgeschichte*) portrayed in the Scriptures in his essay "Faith as Historical Understanding." The historical achievement of Jesus was that His disciples and their followers should recognize Him as the Christ. Since Jesus is the meaning and the goal of *Heilsgeschichte*, "faith in Him involves an historical consciousness and, we may claim, historical understanding." The resurrection brought no disruption to this *Heilsgeschichte* because "the risen Christ is for the Church no other than Jesus." This article is the keystone in the entire presentation for this reviewer, since it demonstrates exgetically that the Scriptures do not distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. All the New Testament belongs to history and the response of faith must recognize this record as historical.

"Fact and Faith in the Kerygma" is an excerpt from the book of the same name by Paul Althaus, the late professor of systematic and New Testament theology at the University of Erlangen. Against Bultmann, Althaus argues that history must be included in the kerygma and not excluded from it. If the apostolic witness calls me to make a decision, then I must presuppose that the apostles have trustworthy knowledge. Bultmann is wrong in abstracting Luther's principle of *sola fide*, so that the question of the historical facts are unimportant to faith. "For Luther, the principle *sola fide* is inconceivable without previously assumed certainty about Holy Scripture, its reliability, and consequentially the historical reality of the history to which it bears witness."

Dr. Gordon Clark of Butler University, Indianapolis, investigates the motives of the best known protagonist for the kerygmatic theology in "Bultmann's Historiography." Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg is as arbitrary in his New Testament criticism as was the infamous David Friedrich Strauss of a century ago. Bultmann is compared to the Platonic influenced theologians of the early church who tried to find the true meaning of the Bible by scraping away the outer layer of history. While claiming to be an objective theologian, he is upon closer examination a strange mixture of presuppositions and subjective existentialism. Clark claims that Bultmann has never given clear definitions to his favorite cliches "encounter" and "achieving being." The question for this reviewer is not whether the Marburg theologian is saying anything "meaningful", but rather is he saying anything intelligible.

The essay "Toward A Christian Philosophy of History" is contributed by John Warwick Montgomery, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois and a member of the Missouri Synod, who has served as lecturer at both the St. Louis and Springfield seminaries. Montgomery contends that the Gospel records of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection do not suffer from the historical difficulties and inconsistencies so common to those writings

of that period. The kerygmatic Christ who rose from the dead is also the historical Jesus and His resurrection is so historical (*historisch*) that it can be demonstrated to a disbelieving Thomas. The existential approach to history is criticized as always being inadequate because it obliterates the subject-object distinction. There is no reason that the Scriptures should be accepted as being anything but historical.

Dr. Henry Kantzer, Dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois presents the concluding section, "The Christ-Revelation as Act and Interpretation." An overview of the concept of revelation in traditional orthodoxy and contemporary theology is given. Helpful is the distinction made between Bultmann's position on revelatory acts which are neither necessarily historical nor historically verifiable and that of the *Heilsgeschichte* school where revelation is both historical and historically verifiable. The Bible views revelation as historical, objective, factual and objectively verifiable, supplemented by a word-revelation. This revelation centering in Jesus Christ is mediated by the Spirit to faith through the Holy Scripture, which is the inspired record of the revelatory acts and words.

This reviewer has saved the applause till the end. These sixteen scholars, each renowned in his own field, present convincing articles showing that "the Jesus of history" is none other than "the Christ of faith" who has arisen from the dead. The methodology of dividing the presentation into individual separate sections recommends this book to those who are looking for an introduction to an area in modern theology with which they are basically unfamiliar. For those who are already working with the dichotomous hypothesis that "the Jesus of history" only became "the Christ of faith" in the preaching of the church, this volume will show that their method is exegetically questionable. There is no other book available in the English language on the "Jesus of history" and "the resurrected Christ of faith" problem that brings under one cover such sound scholarship in the defense of the biblical and traditional Christology. It deserves careful study by the clergy of the church and its theological students, and easily recommends itself for classroom use and conference papers. Each writer contributes a bibliography for those prone to dig a little deeper. May this book strengthen the church in its conviction that He who has arisen from the dead is identical with the Son of Mary, the Rabbi from Nazareth, and "the Jesus of history." Only then will the church fulfill the New Testament imperative in proclaiming that Jesus is indeed the Lord to the glory of God the Father.