

BOOK REVIEW

John S. Kloppenborg with John W. Marshall (eds.), *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus: Subtexts in Criticism* (JSHJ; JSNTSup, 275; London/New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2005). x + 141 pp. Hbk. US\$130.00.

Two issues predominate in contemporary historical Jesus research: (1) the relation of apocalypticism to Jesus' mission, message and morality and (2) his status as a Jew. Both are controversial topics spawned by studies in the early twentieth century, although the latter has gained increasing popularity through a series of publications in the 1970s—most significantly by E.P. Sanders and Géza Vermès. This volume, the result of a colloquium by the same title at the University of Toronto, does not seek to weigh in on this debate *directly*, however. Instead, each of the contributors steps back from the dialogue and provides a second-order reflection upon the ideological and theological subtexts that seem to be driving these discussions. Kloppenborg suggests that the central questions of historical Jesus research 'have less to do with the quantity and character of the available ancient evidence than they do with the way in which the modern critic assembles evidence into a coherent picture, and with the conceptual and theological subtexts of historical Jesus scholarship' (pp. vii-viii). The Jewishness of Jesus and the nature of his apocalyptic message are taken up in this volume, but only within this larger ideological, subtextual context.

This project can, of course, be a tricky task. Contributors are faced on the one hand with the dilemma of commenting upon the agenda that may (or may not) be driving the work of their colleagues while at the same time attempting to avoid vacuous *ad hominem* arguments and ideological psychologizing of previous research. It is a delicate balance, one that is often maintained, but not always, despite many caveats to the contrary. When assessing the motives of and influences upon a scholar, it is exceedingly difficult to avoid slipping into

providing an assessment of the scholar rather than of the scholar's work. Some contributors are more successful at avoiding this pitfall than others, but few seem to fully escape it.

This point notwithstanding, *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus* provides an original and valuable collection of reflections on the nature of contemporary Jesus scholarship as well as innovative suggestions as to what might be driving its most central concerns. Seven essays make up the body of the book with a helpful closing response by Dale Allison and William Arnal, who are also contributors to the volume. The essays are written from diverse perspectives on the issues of apocalypticism and anti-Semitism and command the attention of the reader if for no other reason than the brief but impressive list of contributors included (aside from those already mentioned): Paula Fredriksen, John Marshall, A.J. Levine and Robert Miller.

Kloppenborg's essay, 'As One Unknown, without a Name?' opens the volume. The title of the essay (minus the question mark) is taken from the closing paragraph of Schweitzer's milestone work, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. This title is appropriate since the essay offers an extensive exposition of the main agenda items in Schweitzer's monograph: that the historical Jesus was mistaken in his understanding of the imminence of cosmic transformation and the 'interim ethic' that this apocalyptic picture of Jesus entailed. The second portion of the essay covers a few key apocalyptic portrayals after Schweitzer (Bultmann, Käsemann, Hengel, Pannenberg, Moltmann), illustrating a diverse array of ideological and theological influences. Kloppenborg's objective in this historical survey is to disconfirm the claim that 'while those espousing a non-apocalyptic Jesus are presenting a portrait torqued by their own ideological interests, the apocalyptic Jesus, as foreign and strange to the twentieth, and now the twenty-first century, is somehow less susceptible to such co-optations' (p. 23). A bit of irony in this essay (which seeks to comment on the subtexts that drive modern reconstructions of the historical Jesus) is that it appears to be animated by its own agenda to protect the ideological interests of the Jesus Seminar, a theme which continually represents itself in this volume—also heavily present in Arnal's essay, for example.

William Arnal also marshals various examples from the history of New Testament scholarship in order to illustrate the tendency of previous Jesus research to read one's own agenda into Jesus' agenda in

his essay, 'The Cipher "Judaism" in Contemporary Historical Jesus Scholarship'. Arnal notes three influences in particular that have been formative in shaping the current climate of historical Jesus research: politics, religion and post-modernism. According to Arnal, the Second Temple rendition of Jesus is constructed by modern scholarship as a savior-figure in each of these arenas in order to satisfy latent desires for social redemption in one form or another. The 'Jewish Jesus' is put forward primarily as a political critique and repudiation of the anti-Semitic Nazi scholarship of the 1930s and 40s. 'The discourse of our field is attempting to establish a distance from the Germany of Adolf Hitler, and indeed the culpable anti-Judaism of our scholarly forebears' (p. 28). Of course, Jesus was first and foremost a religious savior-figure, so 'we should expect...that the manufactured debate over the "Jewish Jesus" should reflect religious anxieties and agenda as well' (p. 34). This religious orientation is set in contrast to the emphasis of the Jesus Seminar-type portrayals, especially Funk's, in their tendency to move Christianity 'away from a dogmatic focus and more toward a socially activist focus' (p. 39). Arnal is critical, therefore, of the religious/political implications put forward in the work of Wright, Hays, Meier and Sanders, which indicate that historically and academically adequate pictures of the historical Jesus will emphasize a *certain type* of Jewishness in their constructions, and those that do not are anti-Semitic. For Arnal, those who stress the 'Judaism of Jesus' are 'making comment on contemporary Christianity, an assertion of the import of its traditional creedal, supernatural, "religious" basis' (p. 40). Arnal claims further that, 'Pearson's fulminations against the "secular" Jesus reconstructed by the Jesus Seminar underscore and confirm this conclusion...' (p. 40). While I can sympathize with these sentiments concerning Wright, Hays, Pearson and even Meier, it is hard to see how this analysis is applicable to a scholar like Sanders who evidences no direct concern for upholding a supernatural portrait of Christ—even if Jesus is understood in a thoroughly Jewish context. Arnal also seems to overstate the anti-Semitic nature of the criticisms advanced against the Jesus Seminar by these scholars, employing extreme examples and statements that are not broadly representative. For someone like Sanders, the problems with the Jesus Seminar are more historical than religious/ideological. For many, Funk's understanding removes Jesus from his socio-historical context and imposes modern political revolutionary ideas upon an ancient figure. It is clear that Arnal sees no

problem with this apparent anachronism when he claims that the ‘Promotions of an identifiably and distinctively Jewish Jesus are resisting postmodern or globalizing homogenization and fragmentation precisely in their instance on the coherence of “Jewish” identity’ (p. 52). This assumes, I suppose, that resistance to the wholesale incorporation of the post-modern epistemic agenda is a negative thing, a conclusion I (along with most contemporary epistemologists) am not so certain of. It also highlights what is at issue: the legitimate interpretive framework for reading the primary sources in historical Jesus research, whatever those might be. Which framework is most adequate is another issue. But what is at stake for many, I would suggest, is not (seemingly) an ideology, but an adequate reconstruction of a historical figure based on the available data. So while I welcome and agree with Arnal’s observation that much previous scholarship has mistaken Jesus’ agenda for its own, I am not as quick to see religious supernaturalism as the guiding ideological force in contemporary (Jewish oriented) Jesus studies.

Paula Fredriksen’s essay, ‘Compassion is to Purity as Fish is to Bicycle and Other Reflections on Constructions of “Judaism” in Current Work on the Historical Jesus’, presents a clear, balanced approach to the issues. The objective of her essay is twofold: ‘first, that arguments from utility...cannot settle arguments about historical plausibility; and second, that anachronism is the first and last enemy of the historian’ (pp. 60-61). From my perspective, these statements offer a corrective to Arnal’s remarks and provide a healthy balance to the volume. Yet at the same time, Fredriksen echoes the concerns of Arnal when she insists, ‘The problem is: to legitimate or authorize an ethical belief, too often, scholars impute that belief to Jesus himself’ (p. 65). Therefore, she seems to be aware of the negative impact that ideologies often have upon scholars in their reconstructions of Jesus while not minimizing the value of Jesus’ socio-historical context. Fredriksen’s observations are pertinent and reasonable: ‘As for the ideological uses that any or all of our Jesuses can be put to, I can only observe that, if we ourselves do this, we still have to make our case by an appeal to evidence; and that we all need to count on each other for collegial criticism for help in seeing, or hearing, what we ourselves say’ (p. 67).

John Marshall writes on ‘Apocalypticism and Anti-Semitism: Inner-Group Resources for Inter-Group Conflicts’. Marshall exploits a wide range of apocalyptic literature in order to gain insight into inter-group

relations in the apocalyptic milieu of first-century Palestine, including apocalyptic fragments (*Jubilees*) and texts (the Animal Apocalypse) from Qumran and *Fourth Ezra*. Marshall's helpful study points out some of the unique perceptions that a community insider might have been privileged to and urges scholars to be cautious lest they distort the evidence through the imposition of an outsider perspective onto the data. He concludes by noting one such imposition to be avoided: 'Jesus the "Jew against Judaism" is a trope of Christian anti-Semitism and we are not served by playing into this dynamic' (p. 81).

Amy-Jill Levine's essay, 'The Earth Moved: Jesus, Sex and Eschatology', takes a different approach, using sexual ethics in an apocalyptic-eschatological framework as the basis for her reconstruction of Jesus. 'Thus it is the apocalyptic setting that substantially drives his moral program' (p. 86). Levine offers a series of helpful insights into Jesus' ethics based on a collection of 'sex-passages'. Her claims are strong and controversial, however. She contends that Jesus demanded celibacy of all who followed him (pp. 93-95) and that Jesus, who was not thrilled with lust, was 'even less thrilled with procreation' (p. 95). But while Levine insists that Jesus advocated a celibate life for everyone, as Allison points out (p. 124), this cannot be consistently maintained when one understands the distinction between the two groups to whom Jesus directed his discourse in the Gospels: his disciples and his missionary audience. It is also disappointing to see her fall into a typical etymological fallacy in her exposition of the meaning of eunuch: 'The term *eunouchos* may well derive from *eunē* ("bed" or "marriage bed") and *echō* ("hold, guard"). They guard it, and themselves' (p. 90). This is not to diminish the success of the essay, however. Levine is able to produce a surprisingly full picture of an apocalyptic Jesus based on this limited selection of material.

The title of Dale Allison's essay is 'The Problem of Apocalyptic: From Polemic to Apologetics'. Allison begins by noting, 'Of all the things that the NT is clearly mistaken about, the most obvious is its conviction, plainly expressed in a good number of places, that the consummation is near to hand' (p. 99). On the one hand, this problem has been the source of various polemical attacks on those who uphold the inerrancy of Jesus at any level. These include the Neo-Platonist Porphyry in the third century, the seventeenth-century Deists, and indeed Allison himself. On the other hand, it has also given rise to apologetic defenses of the apocalyptic Jesus as we see, for example, in Joachim

Jeremias. These figures illustrate the theological services to which an apocalyptic Jesus figure can be put to use. But there is also theological incentive for seeing Jesus in just the opposite way, especially the interim ethics that an apocalyptical portrayal entails.

The final essay is by Robert Miller, 'The Theological Stakes in the Apocalyptic Jesus Debate'. Much of Miller's essay is strikingly reminiscent of the themes emphasized by Allison. He begins by claiming, 'If the historical Jesus predicted the imminent End, then, obviously, he was wrong' (p. 113). Either Jesus held an incorrect belief or he did not predict the imminent End. This problem is especially acute for Evangelicals (as opposed to Catholics and Protestant Liberals), Miller claims, since they attempt to maintain both the theological inerrancy of Jesus and his apocalyptic predictions. 'Since this position is clearly untenable, it should not surprise us that most evangelical scholars take the prudent course of ducking the question' (p. 114). This comment comes as a shock—and not only because of its rhetoric. Tom Wright, for example, presents a thoroughly eschatological Jesus in the tradition of Schweitzer (although with significant adaptations) and takes over 300 pages of his *Jesus and the Victory of God* to address precisely this question. Whether his portrait of Jesus as an eschatological prophet is convincing is another issue. The issue at hand is that when one makes a claim that a particular group of scholars is 'ducking the question', they should know whose work (seemingly) has not done so, and be able to address it directly. For whatever reason, Miller chooses instead to limit himself to commenting on a few passing remarks by Witherington and McKnight. On a more positive note, he does issue a much needed rebuke to recent historical Jesus scholarship (he mentions Sanders, Fredriksen, Meier and Allison) that has tended to minimize the role of the parables in its reconstructions—though there are some clear exceptions Miller does not consider. From the 'authentic' parabolic material, Miller then argues briefly for a non-apocalyptic picture of Jesus. As further support for this understanding, he suggests that Jesus 'ruled out the option of armed resistance, not because of a hard-headed assessment of the military situation, but because he rejected apocalypticism and the image of God it entails' (p. 116).

This collection sets up a difficult and delicate task for itself. It must evaluate the ideological frameworks that seem to be driving various constructions of the historical Jesus. Yet how is this to be done without allowing one's own ideologies to surface in the process? Perhaps this is

impossible to avoid, as the contributors seem to recognize. Although the essays lack explicit organization, this point can be illustrated by noting how the essays proceed systematically from their own agendas. The first two seem to protect the subtextual interests of the Jesus Seminar whereas the last two directly criticize the ideologically motivated portraits put forward by Evangelical scholars, with the middle three essays falling on a spectrum somewhere in between.

A volume of this sort is, nonetheless, welcome and needed since it steps outside of the debate temporally and meditates on what subtexts might be animating the most significant elements of the discussion. The determination of these agendas is, as one might imagine, inconclusive. Each reconstruction can be accredited to a particular ideological framework. The value of this anthology, therefore, is found in its admonition to proceed pre-critically and with caution in our portraits of the historical Jesus, guarding against reading our own agendas into that of Jesus. This unique and insightful compendium of scholarship will serve as a hermeneutical guide and warning in subsequent reading and research on the historical Jesus. Its manageable size and elegant style allow for quick and enjoyable reading and its content demands the attention of those involved in these discussions at any level.

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