

Readers' Perspective

■ A “Truer” Picture of Jesus?

I have read issue 49 (JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE, Oct.—Dec. 1995) with great interest, especially “Unlocking the Synoptic Problem: Four Keys for Better Understanding Jesus” by the late Dr. Robert Lindsey, which I assume summarizes the underlying approach of the Jerusalem School.

The attempt to recognize a Hebrew original of the gospels, and to illustrate the Jewish background of Jesus himself, must be valuable in increasing our understanding of Christian faith. But may I make a few critical observations on the matter raised in Lindsey’s conclusion concerning which gospel presents a “truer” picture of Jesus, or is “more reliable” or “superior.”

1. In using such terms, Lindsey seems to make the same basic assumption as the synoptic scholars he criticizes, that the gospels as we have them obscure, rather than illuminate, the real Jesus. Like them, he looks for Jesus in a series of hypothetical documents, for none of which there is objective evidence, except, perhaps, for the Hebrew proto-Matthew mentioned in Papias. (The sources mentioned in Luke 1:1 can only be distinguished from our gospels by the *a priori* acceptance of Lukan priority, which is one of the points at issue.)

Such an assumption presupposes (a) that there was no living eyewitness tradition to validate the canonical gospels, (b) that there was no apostolic oversight of their production, and (c) that all earlier documents had inexplicably been lost, or suppressed, by a church eager to preserve the apostolic teaching. And yet there is increasing support for early dating of all the gospels to within a generation of the events they describe.

2. In treating the evangelists as mere redactors, whose aims were primarily to restore a chronological biography of Jesus, Lindsey’s scheme seems to underplay their role as theologians. They were writing gospels, not biographies, and recording spiritual, not chronological, truth.

3. Lindsey’s scheme seems to take a low view of Scripture *qua* Scripture, at variance with Jesus’

own outlook. He used the canonical Hebrew Scriptures as the authoritative word of God, and made no attempt to search for the “real” Moses in hypothetical sources, as modern Old Testament scholars have done. Christians—except for the Jewish Ebionites, who believed in Matthean priority—have always believed in the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures, and that all four gospels bear the Spirit’s authority.

To discern more of Jesus’ Jewish background in the gospels may be of great value. But to search for a “truer” picture of Jesus in conjectural, reconstructed documents is significantly to devalue scriptural inspiration, as well as God’s spiritual provision for his worldwide Church.

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