

This *Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah*, by Markus Bockmuehl. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994. Pp. xi + 242.

Jesus of Nazareth-Christ of Faith, by Peter Stuhlmacher. Translated by Siegfried Schatzmann. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993 (1988). pp. xvi + 109.*

It is fascinating indeed to read, and to review, in tandem two books on the same subject by two German theologians, one by Peter Stuhlmacher who teaches in Tübingen, the other by Markus Bockmuehl who lectures in Cambridge. The bulk of this review will be devoted to Bockmuehl's work, which is by far the more detailed. Nevertheless, Stuhlmacher's essay is instructive, since it sets the parameters within which a proper theological investigation of Jesus may be conducted.

Stuhlmacher's volume contains three essays originally delivered as lectures between 1983-85. Only the first of these deals with the subject indicated by the title of the book. The work, unfortunately without the informative preface found in the 1988 German edition, is translated rather awkwardly. Nevertheless, it shows why Stuhlmacher is one of the finest theological and hermeneutical thinkers in Germany today. Building on A. Schlatter (cf. pp. 2-7, 38), and in essential agreement with R. Riesner and B. Gerhardsson (pp. 13, 41), Stuhlmacher develops his case that the "Christ of faith" is firmly rooted in Jesus' own teaching and Messianic consciousness. The remaining two essays are devoted to examinations of the reasons for Jesus' death and of the NT witness concerning the Lord's Supper.

Markus Bockmuehl, on the other hand, has provided, in his own terms, a sort of "Let's Go" guide for "serious tourists" traversing the land of contemporary Jesus research. In an effort to overcome the dichotomy between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith," the author seeks to show "that it can be historically legitimate to see Jesus of Nazareth in organic and causal continuity with the faith of the early Church" (p. 8). A credible portrayal of Jesus, Bockmuehl maintains, "must present Jesus in a way that is both historically probable and in plausible continuity with the faith of his first followers" (pp. 7-8).

After surveying the various "quests for the historical Jesus," the author discusses Jesus' origins, Messianic calling, the prediction of the temple's destruction, the questions of whether Jesus failed or not and whether or not he was a Christian, as well as Jesus' prayer life and his exaltation to heaven. Despite his modest claims, Bockmuehl displays admirable bibliographic control and produces a well-written work whose thesis is worth pondering. He shows himself equally adept at British, continental, and North American scholarship, and fully abreast of recent archeological discoveries and Dead Sea Scrolls research.

Nevertheless, the end product is not entirely satisfying. To begin with, Bockmuehl's historical judgments are at times unduly cautious, as when stating that Jesus "may have subtly identified himself with the Son of Man" and "perhaps" authorized a baptism of repentance (cf. Matt. 28:19; p. 123). How plausible is it, it may be asked, *on mere historical grounds*, that the early Christians were prepared to traverse the universe in order to preach the gospel and even to give their lives for their faith merely on the basis of *the possibility* that Jesus gave the "Great Commission"? On the practical level, too, it appears problematic for the church to keep sending out missionaries on the basis of a commission the risen Christ "perhaps" gave and to call believers to obey a Lord who "may" or may not have made certain claims about himself. While it

should be acknowledged that historical criticism, as a science, deals with *probabilities*, not *certainties* (on the relationship between faith and history, cf. recently G. Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*), Bockmuehl's assessments, though certainly more conservative than those of more radical critics, are clearly rooted in scientific doubt rather than proceeding from a stance that has confidence in the reliability of Scripture.

Bockmuehl's portrait of Jesus focuses one-sidedly on the evolution of Jesus' human Messianic consciousness as opposed to his divinity. The following quote illustrates this:

Those purposes [i.e., the purposes of the pre-Easter Jesus] appear to have evolved and gained in clarity of definition over the course of Jesus' career. At his baptism by John, Jesus experienced a vision of divine affirmation and charismatic appointment in Messianic or near-Messianic terms. After working this through in the wilderness, his early ministry of healing and teaching focused on the announcement and symbolic enacting of the imminent Kingdom of God. Growing controversy and opposition led to a second crisis soon after the execution of John the Baptist, when it became clear that the Messianic dimensions of his ministry spelled danger ahead. This realization led him to the conscious reflection and affirmation of suffering as an integral part of his calling, increasingly moving him to interpret his likely death as a ransom and atonement for Israel, and as positively instrumental for bringing in the Kingdom of God. He saw this as fully compatible with his present Messianic role. At the same time, he continued to believe in a final, and perhaps imminent, vindication by the arrival of the heavenly Son of Man, with whom he may have associated himself (p. 97).

How does this portrait of a Jesus who formulates his approach *in response* to circumstances, match, for example, John's presentation of Jesus as the Word from the Father and as the one who is in complete control over the events during His passion? Contrary to Bockmuehl's own hopes, it appears that the present work demonstrates that the gulf between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" opened up by post-Enlightenment scholarship (e.g., H. S. Reimarus, G. E. Lessing, D. F. Strauss, et al.) cannot be bridged merely by historical-critical means, *even if they are employed sympathetically*.

Despite Bockmuehl's concluding plea for openness and faith in the scholarly enterprise, it remains doubtful whether his historical-critical apologetic a "plausible" Jesus will suffice to persuade unbelieving critics to embrace *this Jesus* as their "Christ of faith." For the Christian scholar, methodological concerns continue to loom large. Is it adequate to take a modified historical-critical methodology as one's starting point or should one pursue this task from a decidedly believing stance (cf. here G. Maier's recent advocacy of a *theologia regnitorum*)? An outstanding example of the latter approach is the work of A. Schlatter, to which the author refers at the end of his book as "brilliant but widely ignored" (218, n. 1) while otherwise ignoring it. Finally, Bockmuehl hardly discusses the possibility that the Gospel records may in part reflect eyewitness testimony, nor does he, in the body of his work, probe the implications of the increasingly held view that a substantial portion of early Christian testimony about Jesus may be rooted in the latter's own teaching (cf. Riesner, Gerhardsson; but see p. 19).

Why does Jesus continue to elude the grasp of modern scholarship? The answer may lie in the fact that the subject, i.e., Jesus, transcends any human method. Rather than seeking the solution merely in the refinement of one scholarly methodology, one should acknowledge the need for faith in coming to terms with Jesus. It appears inadequate to start with a historical-critical assessment of the Gospel evidence regarding Jesus and then to take a "leap of faith and

affirm the ancient creeds, as Bockmuehl does frequently. One's faith should already self-consciously inform one's reading of the Gospels themselves. Jesus will never be mastered by the tools of historical criticism or by any other means. May no method be permitted to limit faith in Jesus from penetrating into regions which human scholarship alone will never see.

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