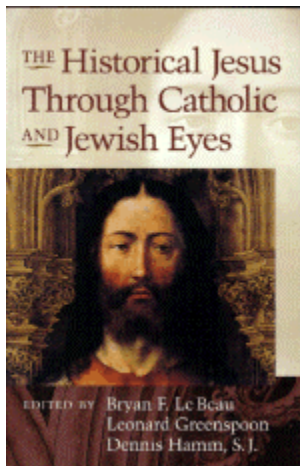


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Le Beau, Bryan F., Leonard J. Greenspoon, and Dennis Hamm, eds.

The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes

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This volume collects seven stimulating papers presented at two colloquia in 1997 and 1998 at Creighton University, supplemented by an introduction, an epilogue, and two surveys of pertinent scholarly literature. At the first colloquium, organized as a response to the publicity generated by the Jesus Seminar, three prominent Catholic scholars addressed some problems and benefits of contemporary historical Jesus research. The following year, four Jewish scholars were invited to reflect on various aspects of historical Jesus studies. Thus, several of the published essays address the Jewishness of Jesus, which is seen as one of the most promising topics for Jewish-Christian dialogue. Others deal with epistemological and theological presuppositions that are frequently neglected in recent historical Jesus studies.

To provide some background for the issues and literature presupposed in the individual essays, the editors wisely invited Bernard Brandon Scott to write a survey of historical Jesus research over the past centuries ("New Options in an Old Quest" [1-49]). Scott briefly summarizes the main goals of the three "stages" and then analyzes in greater detail the recent contributions of Geza Vermes, Morton Smith, E. P. Sanders, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, John Meier, N. T. Wright, Robert Funk's "The Jesus Seminar," and several others. Scott systematically examines various factors that distinguish these scholars' approaches: whether they start with concrete data or a general hypothesis, whether they focus on Jesus' deeds or his words, whether they consider Jesus' preaching to be apocalyptic or not, and so forth. He concludes with seven "characteristics of this third stage of the quest that hold true of all the investigators, despite their

differences" (38-42). Scott's fine survey is fairly comprehensive, but it would be even better if he also situated some other authors mentioned prominently in the subsequent articles, such as John Bowden, Bishop Spong, and Barbara Thiering.

Luke Timothy Johnson admits that the title of his essay, "The Real Jesus: The Challenge of Current Scholarship and the Truth of the Gospels" (51-65) is ironic, since one of his main points is that any historical reconstruction cannot be the "real" Jesus. He argues that most contemporary studies are based on five "fundamental misconceptions" that fail to get at the truth of the gospel. Most "questers" today fail to realize that "history is simply not the same as reality" (55); that is, knowing the "real Jesus" is possible through criteria of religious truth that cannot be reduced to mere historicity. Johnson stresses that Christian faith is based not merely on the words and actions of the earthly Jesus, a figure of the remote past, but on the resurrected Jesus, a person still accessible in the present community of believers. He also chides historical Jesus researchers for ignoring Paul's letters. Although Paul does not often quote Jesus' words or recount events from Jesus' life, he presents the same overall pattern of his life, death, and resurrection, which for Johnson is more relevant than any portrait reconstructed from a small pile of historically incontrovertible facts. Although most of Johnson's critiques are pertinent, they do not apply equally to all scholars, and some of his claims are polemically exaggerated: "Historical Jesus research is irrelevant to Christian faith because the resurrection is not a historical but an eschatological event" (59). Most Christian scholars, however, would agree that there is some benefit to historical research. It would be valuable to have more nonpolemical dialogue to clarify unspoken theological assumptions and epistemological presuppositions held by many scholars and believers today.

Dan Harrington's contribution, "Retrieving the Jewishness of Jesus: Recent Developments" (67-84), focuses on four issues: the impact of newly published fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the resurgent study of Jesus and Jewish wisdom literature, the attribution of responsibility for the death of Jesus to Roman and/or Jewish authorities, and the reasons why Matthew seems to be both the most Jewish and the most anti-Jewish of the four canonical Gospels.

Monika Hellwig's brief essay, "Historical Jesus Research: Its Relevance to Thoughtful Christians and to Systematic Theologians" (85-93), deals mainly with Christology. She stresses that for Catholics, in contrast to some Christians who claim to base their faith on Scripture alone, there is never only one source for theological reflection; foundational is not only the earthly life of Jesus but also the impact Jesus has had on believers throughout the centuries. Thus, while contemporary Christology may be affected by advances in historical biblical studies, the object of Christian faith will always be much more than anyone's minimizing reconstruction of historically certain facts.

The four papers presented by Jewish scholars at the 1998 colloquium cover various topics. Michael Cook's "Jewish Reflections on Jesus: Some Abiding Trends" (95-111) summarizes five contemporary perspectives: (1) the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus' stance toward Judaism was affected by changes in Christianity's relationship with Judaism; (2) differing interpretations of Paul's theology influenced the varying Gospel portraits of Jesus; (3) some teachings ascribed to Jesus are actually later Christian responses to challenges by Jewish opponents; (4) the later Gospels intensified the anti-Judaism of their sources; and (5) Christian tradition modeled Jesus' image according to the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures. Such perspectives help Jews today understand the anomaly that, although Jesus himself was Jewish, the Gospels often portray him along anti-Jewish lines.

Amy-Jill Levine ("Jesus, Divorce, and Sexuality: A Jewish Critique" [113-29]) carefully investigates the sayings about marriage and divorce attributed to Jesus. In contrast to many contemporary Christians (especially third-world feminist theologians), who tend "to read Jesus' comments on gender and sexuality selectively, and always to the disparagement of Judaism," Levine argues for the authenticity of Jesus' pronouncements on divorce. She also shows that it is wrong to assume that divorce was common or that Jewish women had no rights in Jesus' day. Moreover, she argues that Jesus' teachings about divorce are an example of strong sexual ethics typical for eschatological prophets and apocalyptic communities, whereas the New Testament apostles and evangelists began the process of adapting and modifying Jesus' apparently absolutist and radical pronouncements.

In "Jesus of Hollywood: A Jewish Perspective" (131-46), Adele Reinhartz matches three basic trends in historical Jesus scholarship with corresponding depictions of Jesus in film. Just as the Jewishness of Jesus is central for some scholars (e.g., Sanders and Vermes), so also is this a dominant feature of some films (e.g., Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*). In contrast, some scholarly reconstructions stress Jesus' role as a wisdom teacher or Cynic sage (especially Crossan). Reinhartz connects this portrait to such films as Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* and Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Finally, the scholarly model that pictures Jesus "as a prophet engaged in radical social criticism" (e.g., Borg and Wright) is compared to Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal*. Although a few filmmakers intentionally avoided scholarly input, most films have been influenced by the results of contemporary Jesus research. Reinhartz also suggests that the desire to avoid anti-Semitism has strongly affected how Jesus has been portrayed in film over the past century. She concludes with the sober realization that, just as films about Jesus are inevitably influenced by many subjective elements, so also any scholar's understanding of Jesus is partially determined by various personal and cultural factors.

Alan Segal's contribution, "Jesus in the Eyes of One Jewish Scholar" (147-54), focuses on the problems of the "criterion of dissimilarity" used in historical Jesus research. Although this criterion was helpful in proving the existence of Jesus (against radical critics who doubted that Jesus ever lived), it is ultimately not enough, since it

isolates Jesus from his Jewish context. Rather, Segal maintains, one must go beyond the minimal number of certain facts and fill out the picture of Jesus based on his first-century Jewish context and the subsequent rise of early Christianity. Thus, Segal views Jesus as a Jewish apocalypticist whose preaching was adapted by his followers, who saw his death as a martyrdom and experienced his continuing presence as the resurrected Messiah and Son of Man. Yet Segal contrasts the apocalypticism of Jesus and his disciples with that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

To complement Scott's extensive survey of mostly Christian authors, a brief essay by Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Jesus As Other People's Scripture" (155-66), introduces the reader to some recent works about Jesus by Jewish scholars. Instead of summarizing the works of individuals, however, he discusses more broadly why modern Jewish scholars are interested in studying Jesus and Christian origins. He asserts that Jewish scholars today, in contrast to the past, are willing to "grant some degree of religious authority to Jesus," albeit still in a "tacit, indirect, and highly qualified" sense (159). Jesus' religious authority for Christians is compared to the authority of the Torah and other key religious symbols for Judaism. Brumberg-Kraus also suggests some benefits of such studies for Jewish communal interests and for interreligious cooperation in a pluralistic culture.

In his epilogue (167-71), Leonard Greenspoon wonders retrospectively if a more productive interreligious dialogue might have been stimulated if they had planned from the start to have a mixture of Catholic and Jewish scholars at each of the two colloquia. Similarly, I think this volume of collected essays would be even more valuable if it included some brief "responses" to each of the papers and/or some summaries of the ensuing discussions. Nonetheless, the quality of the individual papers is quite high, and detailed endnotes are provided for all but one of them. The contributing authors and the host professors at Creighton University should be commended for their efforts at stimulating Jewish-Christian dialogue about Jesus and for sharing the results of their efforts with a wider audience through this volume, which offers distinctive perspectives in the crowded arena of recent historical Jesus publications.