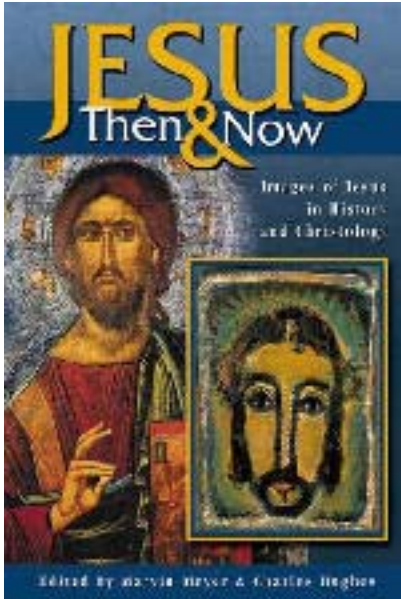


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**Meyer, Marvin, and Charles Hughes, eds.**

***Jesus Then and Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology***

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The essays in this volume derive mainly from an international conference on images of Jesus and other special presentations at Chapham University in 1999. They are divided into three main parts: (1) Images of Jesus in History; (2) Images of Jesus in Christology; and (3) Images of Jesus in Judaism, Islam and the Future.

James M. Robinson opens the volume with a sketch of the Jesus of Q. Adolf von Harnack built his “essence of Christianity” on the sayings of Jesus, that is, on Q. Although Q is mainly a sayings collection, it should be regarded as a Gospel. Jesus set out without any human security, trusting God as a benevolent Father who would provide. Central to the way of life he envisaged was loving one’s enemies. The Sermon on the Mount in fact presents the core of his message.

Colin Brown’s article, “The Jesus of Mark,” argues that the Jesus of history could be encountered through Mark’s Jesus. Mark is a form of ancient biography, an apocalyptic apology that should be read “with the grain” in order to determine what Mark wanted us to see and “against the grain” in order to discover the position of Jesus’ adversaries. Mark’s Jesus is the agent of the purifying, life-giving Spirit of God, his resurrection being the ultimate act of cleansing.

In “Jesus and the Resurrection” N. T. Wright denies that the belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus entered Christianity at a developed stage. Jewish expectation excluded the idea of an executed and resurrected Messiah. The fact that the Christian movement nevertheless proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, “cheerfully re-drawing the picture of Messianism around him, but refusing to abandon it,” can only be explained by their conviction of his resurrection. Anyone arguing that first-century Christians would have understood “resurrection” in terms of Jesus’ body being still in the tomb, while experiencing his spiritual presence, faces a formidable challenge.

Marvin Meyer’s article, “Albert Schweitzer and the Image of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas,” introduces the reader to Jesus, the Jewish sage, as we encounter him in the Sermon on the Mount, Q, and the *Gospel of Thomas*. In *Thomas* Jesus encourages seeking and finding, tells stories about the kingdom, promotes an alternative lifestyle, promises transformation, and uses cryptic sayings. It seems that in the thinking of Albert Schweitzer Jesus’ teachings on love eventually may have replaced the apocalyptic vision.

John Dominic Crossan deals with “Eschatology, Apocalypticism and the Historical Jesus.” According to Schweitzer, Jesus was totally mistaken about the imminent end of the world. Dale Allison also maintained that Jesus’ apocalyptic dream was mistaken. Nevertheless, his apocalyptic vision still remains the only one worth having. How is this possible? The solution is to be found in the distinction between a primary, destructive, material apocalyptic and a secondary, transformative, social, nonviolent one. The latter implies a really meaningful ethic in harmony with the character of God, in which justice, goodness, and nonviolence prevail.

Jonathan Reed indicates in “Galilean Archaeology and the Historical Jesus” that the task of archaeology has shifted from an endeavor to verify Christian faith to finding evidence for discerning the religious, cultural, social, and economic patterns of the world of Jesus. Excavations in Galilee have proven its predominantly Jewish character, rendering Cynic influence highly improbable. The building activities of Herod Antipas accentuated social stratification, the divide between rich and poor, and the uncertainty of earthly possessions. Jesus’ preaching, as represented in Q, fits well within this picture.

In “The Jesus Seminar and the Quest” Robert Funk gives an account of the history, guiding principles, working procedures, and results of the Jesus Seminar. The Seminar started its work in 1985 after enlisting a group of more than seventy-five serious scholars, together with a number of nonprofessional associates. Their most significant achievement is “the production of knowledge which makes a difference.” In the search for a reliable database, they sorted five hundred sayings attributed to Jesus, occurring in twenty-two Gospels, and eventually came up with ninety aphorisms and parables that would echo the

authentic voice of Jesus. Investigating 387 reports of 176 events and deeds ascribed to Jesus, they wound up with twenty-nine events and forty-two narrative statements. These results were published in *The Five Gospels* and *The Acts of Jesus*. The Seminar came to the conclusion that Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet but a sage in the tradition of Israelite wisdom.

Writing about “Literal and Metaphorical Christologies,” John Hick offers a metaphorical concept of divine incarnation. The idea of a “virgin birth” and the Chalcedonian Christology are logically unconvincing. Incarnation should be understood like the proposition that “Nelson Mandela incarnates the spirit of the new South Africa.” Likewise Jesus, living out the will of God on earth, could be called “God incarnate.” For modern Christians such a metaphorical understanding will be much more acceptable. It will also open up recognition of other great religious personalities “in an age when it is no longer realistically possible to think of Christianity as the one and only way to God.”

Charles T. Hughes writes on “Pluralism, Inclusivism and Christology.” He argues for an inclusivistic position that accepts the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his salvific work but also that God’s redemptive love is operative in all human cultures and religions. Those who respond to the light given to them are saved. Inclusivism offers a more satisfactory explanation of religious phenomena than exclusivism.

Richard Swinburne weighs the “Evidence for the Incarnation” by means of logical argumentation. If we consider our evidence, we must conclude both that there was a real need for incarnation and that Jesus rightly fulfilled that need. By using the Bayesian probability calculus, he claims that he can justify formally the claim that Jesus must have been God incarnate.

Karen Torjesen writes on “Wisdom, Christology and Women Prophets.” A trajectory of wisdom Christology and prophets, associated with femininity, runs from Paul and the Gospel writers through the Shepherd of Hermas and the churches of Lyon and Vienne to the New Prophecy movement of the second and third centuries. Within the latter movement, Priscilla has a vision of the gynemorphic Christ, commissioning her as a prophetess. Other women also functioned as leaders within this movement. Epiphanius’s protest resulted from the single-sex theory of his time.

“Jesus in Process Christology” is the theme of Ronald L. Farmer’s essay. The constructive postmodern worldview of process theology understands ultimate reality as composed, not of substances, but of events. As a result, it can overcome the problems of the traditional two-substance Christology. In the creative advance of the world there are special *kairotic* moments, such as occasioned in Jesus. However, other humans could also

experience analogous (not identical) moments. Thus, religious pluralism is made possible. Due to one's basic premises, a processed-informed interpreter would not aprioristically deny the miraculous in the life of Jesus but would rely on Gospel research to discover a historical kernel beneath the layers of embellishment.

The title of Carter Heyward's quite poetic contribution is "Subverting Authoritarian Relation: Jesus' Power and Ours." Mutuality is fundamental. Therefore, all authoritarian relations are morally corrupt. Jesus should be loved as a brother rather than worshiped as a god. His divinity is the same as ours: together, in mutual relation with our brothers and sisters. In addition, God as Trinity means a relational understanding of what is sacred. To live a trinitarian faith implies that in our struggle for mutuality we break free from self-absorption.

In "Christology after Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective," Didier Pollefeyt finds it a historical irony that it is Jesus, the *Jew*, who divides Jews and Christians. Moltmann's eschatological solution of the Jewish-Christian conflict may point in the right direction. A representative Christology will open up the way for Christians to confess Jesus as the Christ without repudiating the salvific, covenantal relationship of the Jews with God.

In "Jewish Perspectives of Jesus," S. David Sperling presents talmudic and other Jewish responses to Jesus. He welcomes the progress being made in interfaith dialogue. Contextual historical scholarship can deepen our understanding of one another. Should the knowledge thus gained be disseminated on a popular level within the two faith communities, this could only be to the good.

F. E. Peters writes on "Jesus in Islam." Although the Qur'an contains various details about Mary and Jesus, it presents a low Christology. Jesus was an important prophet but not the decisive one. He belongs to Islam's *Heilsgeschichte*, but he does not really play a role in its religious sensibility.

In "The Global Future and Jesus" Lloyd Geering reminds us that during the last 150 years our view of our world and of ourselves has changed beyond all recognition. We are entering a post-Christian and a very fragile global future for which we must take full responsibility. On the one hand, positive forces move toward global stability; on the other, our age has seen a revival of ethnic and religious tribalism and fundamentalism. We are also at war with our own planet. Salvation for the future will lie in recognizing and exploring our common humanity. In this context, the affirmation of the fully human Jesus, of Jesus the sage, will be a great gain.

A critical assessment of such a kaleidoscope of positions is impossible. However, as the editors observed correctly, the critical, most basic question is whether one accepts the worldview of theism or that of naturalism. Taking the first position, no heavy logical sophistry, as displayed by some, is needed to defend Jesus' miracles, resurrection, and the like. From the second position, all supernatural interventions are ruled out. One remains with Jesus the sage or whatever Jesus our ideologies or ingenuities may produce. Both sides should realize the decisive importance of their points of departure and concede that they enjoy the epistemological status of "faith" premises.