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Profiles of Jesus

Roy W. Hoover, Editor

Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge Press, 2002

256 pages, \$18.07 Softcover

Roy W. Hoover manages in one short volume to gather together many of the insights which emerged from the third “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” better known as the Jesus Seminar. As well, in this collection of essays he manages to include some of the more well-known of the scholars who inaugurated this new effort in the 1980s, figures such as Robert W. Funk, James M. Robinson (bridge between the second and third quests), Marcus Borg (instrumental in popularizing the Seminar’s work) and John Dominic Crossan (whose brilliance and literary skill have crossed the boundary of scholarship and popular writing with consummate skill).

Although all the essays are worthwhile and useful to an interested reader, I chose to highlight particular ones which seem particularly creative or of personal interest. By way of disclaimer, I am not suggesting that those chosen by me are of necessity better than others. Rather I focus on those which both fed me and piqued my interest the most. As a fan of Crossan’s work I read eagerly his “Jesus as A Mediterranean Jewish Peasant.” At the same time I expected it to be a rehash of his earlier more extensive work. It was that (and why not), but also it was more. In this brief piece he managed to summarize his earlier work with crispness and clarity, weaving it together with his expected literary panache. Kathleen E. Corley’s “Gender and Class in the Teaching of Jesus: a Profile” challenges the earlier work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, among others, who suggest that Jesus’ ministry offered a gender equality that drew oppressed women to the movement. Corley suggests rather that Jesus embodied the patriarchal values of his society and that women’s attraction to the movement is better explained from Jesus’ connection with the marginalized economically. Although I am not prepared to adopt this view uncritically I am committed to reading her well-reviewed book on the subject. Stephen J. Patterson, reputed *Gospel of Thomas* scholar, provides us with a powerful piece in his “Dirt, Shame, and Sin in the Expendable Company of Jesus.” In this finely crafted chapter we encounter a powerful apologia for theological scholarship as well as a poignant picture of the empire of expendables Jesus

offered over against the class, power and success driven empire of Rome and its clients. However, it is Mahlon H. Smith's "Israel's Prodigal Son: Reflections on Reimagining Jesus" which stands out in the arena of creativity. Dr. Smith suggests that the glaringly unique story of the Prodigal Son might provide the one example of Jesus' autobiographical reflections that we have. The author derives this position from the many passages that portray the hostility and misunderstanding toward Jesus from members of his own family, especially the relation between James the Just and Jesus before and after his death. Am I convinced? No, I am cautious, but I am also intrigued. It is a compelling and appealing suggestion.

So I encourage all readers interested in the work of the Jesus Seminar to pick up *Profiles of Jesus* and give it a try. The readings are both erudite and enjoyable. All in all Hoover's collection provides a great appetizer for introducing the Jesus Seminar through its own voices.

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**Women & Christianity:
From the Reformation to the 21st Century (Vol. III)**

Mary T. Malone

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books and Novalis, 2003

334 pages, \$36.14 Hardcover

This book marks the completion of Dr. Mary Malone's monumental three-volume *Women & Christianity* work. In these three books Dr. Malone has contributed to the field of Christian history a basic textbook that has no equal. To be sure, there are a handful of other studies on Christian women that trace their role in the two thousand year period in which Christianity has walked across the pages of history, but none can compete with Malone in terms of depth and breadth. Add to this a fine literary touch and you have a comprehensive series that is both erudite and artistic. This is not to discount the extensive and deeply scholarly work of other historical scholars in the field such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and