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Jesus as a figure in history: how modern historians view the man from Galilee

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particularly interesting to those concerned with the diversity of religious life in the first century, and with setting early Christianity in its Jewish matrix.

Amanda R. Witmer
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Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee

Mark Allan Powell

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998

238 pages, \$33.95 Softcover

During the past decade, scholarship on the historical Jesus has seen a remarkable resurgence. Confident in their methodologies and conclusions, spotlighted in the secular media, scholars such as Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan have generated new light — and no little controversy — regarding the historical figure of Jesus.

In *Jesus as a Figure in History* Mark Allan Powell provides an excellent and useful guide through the field of contemporary scholarship on the historical Jesus. Some of the scholars in this field are people of Christian faith, while others are not. What they share is the assumption that the methods of normal historical enquiry are to be used in order to discover reliable data about the figure of Jesus. Where these scholars differ is in which methods they espouse and in their understanding of what is historically reliable; the result is a series of more or less divergent pictures of Jesus in comparison with the Jesus of the church's tradition. In effect, Powell's book is also a study in the strengths and weaknesses of the assumptions and methodologies evident in current scholarship on the historical Jesus.

The two initial chapters trace the history of the quest for the historical Jesus, survey the primary sources, and describe the criteria which have been developed in the field. Chapter 3 looks at brief "snapshots" of the historical Jesus, i.e., aspects of Jesus' career (rather than wholesale portraits) which have been emphasized by certain recent scholars: Richard A. Horsley (Jesus as social prophet), Geza Vermes (Jesus as charismatic Jew), Morton Smith (Jesus as magician), Ben Witherington

(Jesus as Jewish sage), and F. Gerald Downing (Jesus as Cynic philosopher).

In the main portion of the book, chapters 4 through 9, Powell presents a thorough analysis of six pre-eminent recent studies of the historical Jesus, including the work of the Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus J. Borg, E.P. Sanders, John P. Meier, and N.T. Wright. In each chapter Powell describes the methods used by the scholar(s) in question, the picture of Jesus which has resulted, and criticisms of each position which have been proposed by other scholars. One inescapable conclusion is that Schweitzer's century old critique still holds true: the assumptions which a historian brings to the study of Jesus will largely dictate their resulting picture of the historical Jesus.

The final chapter of the book lists a number of key issues which continue to be debated in the field: methodology; the type of first century Judaism in which Jesus is best situated and his relation to Greco-Roman culture; Jesus' eschatological views; his relation to the politics of his day; his self-consciousness; and presuppositions regarding the supernatural. Powell also discusses the relevance of current Jesus scholarship for the church, concluding that the Jesus of the church's story is only partially informed by the results of historians' research. Just as the Jesus of the church's story produced the earliest hymns which were the first traditions about Jesus, so too it is the church's story of Jesus which evokes the worship of people of faith today.

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The Pastoral Epistles. The International Critical Commentary

I. Howard Marshall

Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999

869 pages, \$115.00 Hardcover

The Pastoral Epistles (PE) may confront the modern reader with some uncomfortable difficulties, in terms of content and, for some, debates about authorship. In his recent commentary, I. Howard Marshall emphasizes that the PE are "inspirational documents" (p.98) in their own right. Marshall does two things particularly well: he aptly articulates