

Jesus Now and Then

by Richard A. Burridge and Graham Gould

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004. 215 pp. \$16.00. ISBN 0-8028-0977-4.

BURRIDGE AND GOULD look at the Jesus of history, whose impact on people “then” gave rise to the early Church and its writings, in an effort to account for his tremendous effect on people “now,” at the beginning of the Third Millennium. Utilizing the New Testament and various non-canonical sources, Burridge argues that Jesus of Nazareth existed, was baptized by John, gathered a controversial group of followers (including a number of women), and was executed by the Romans for preaching a message that “opened the Kingdom of God to the wicked” (p. 44). Moreover, Burridge contends “it is no less an historical fact that after Jesus was dead and buried, an extraordinary event happened which transformed the once-terrified disciples and gave rise to a movement which we know as the early Church” (p. 46). Following this sketch, Burridge looks more closely at the Gospels and other New Testament documents for what they convey about the person of Jesus. He interprets the Gospels as narrative Christologies united by the affirmation that the Jesus who lived among us is God. Paul’s letters focus on Jesus’ life, death and resurrection as a single eschatological event, and the rest of the New Testament, Burridge writes, takes for granted that Jesus is “Lord, human and divine, Son of God the Father” (p. 105).

Gould begins where Burridge leaves off, tracing the post-New Testament Church’s efforts to express its beliefs about Jesus with greater conceptual precision. He also locates these efforts in a wider theological context; he examines the Church’s use of Jesus’ moral teaching in its preaching and as apologetic, and considers the central place of Jesus in early Christian worship. He points out that many modern Christians who are unsatisfied with the abstract features of the doctrines of the Trinity and incarnation find the moral teachings of Jesus compelling and are interested in early Christian liturgy. At times, Gould hints that the ability to say that Jesus was kind and generous is more important than confidence in his divinity. However, he concludes that the significance of Jesus’ resurrection requires

Christians to believe that he was “more than simply a teacher or a moral example,” and indicates that the experience of Jesus as risen “justifies Christians today in holding to the belief that Jesus is God” (p. 208).

This text ably serves the purpose of introducing readers to the Jesus of history, whose life, death, and resurrection gave rise to the Christian Church. What it lacks in terms of a sustained argument, it makes up for as a survey drawn from multiple disciplines and presented by authors with differing points of view. It is written in a lively and engaging style, defines difficult terms and unfamiliar ideas, and suggests resources for pursuing the topic in greater depth. Perhaps the strongest feature of the work is its presentation of New Testament Christologies. The text explicitly states that the creeds of the early Church, as well as the biblical accounts of Jesus, “can be seen as legitimate outworkings of Jesus’ own self-consciousness” (p. 107). On its view of New Testament Christologies, one may nonetheless question the value to theology of the philosophical language of the creeds and maintain a commitment to the teaching that Jesus is God come among us in human form.

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The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities

by Holly E. Hearon

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THIS VOLUME EXAMINES the three canonical reports of an appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Mary Magdalene: Matthew 28:9–10, John 20:1–18, and Mark 16:9–11 (i.e., the longer ending of Mark, or the Markan appendix). Hearon draws on recent studies of the relationship of oral storytelling and written text and of the survival of the techniques and markers of oral storytelling in the Gospels. She argues that the three versions of an appearance to Mary are independent of each other and draw upon an oral source or perhaps sources. Hearon provides imaginative