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# The man in the scarlet robe: 2000 years of searching for Jesus

Ted Heinze

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light of rhetorical conventions and/or Jewish-Christian relations.

Edith M. Humphrey  
Aylmer, Quebec

### **The Man in the Scarlet Robe: Two Thousand Years of Searching for Jesus**

Michael R. McAteer and Michael G. Steinhauser

Etobicoke, Ont.: The United Church Publishing House, 1996  
xii + 172 pp. Paper

“Why, in this high-tech secular age, when humans are probing the very heavens and unlocking the secrets of DNA, do people continue to discuss, talk about, even argue about, a man who died a shameful death on a Roman cross so long ago?” Thus authors McAteer (until recently religion editor at *The Toronto Star*) and Steinhauser (New Testament professor at Toronto School of Theology) pose the question this little book seeks to illumine. Pointing out that some 70,000 “biographies” of Jesus of Nazareth have already been written, they seek here to present a summary of the “search for the historical Jesus” over the years, with particular focus on the so-called “third quest” of the past decade, especially the work of John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, and other members of The Jesus Seminar.

The book is directed to the non-professional, Christian or otherwise, and surely succeeds in its authors’ intent. I’d not be surprised to see it listed in a good many bibliographies for “New Testament Introduction” courses.

In eight brightly written chapters McAteer and Steinhauser include discussions of: the contradictions and problems that are evident in the canonical Gospels, especially as contrasted with the Pauline letters, when Jesus’ nature, his self-understanding, and his expectations about the end, are studied; the development of doctrine concerning Jesus in the early church, the political defeat of Arianism and its “heretical” view of Jesus, and the mysteries involved in how the New Testament canon gained acceptance; the importance for Jesus-research of the hypothetical “Q” document, of other “Gospels”, and of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library; the history of dissent concerning the orthodox, or official, view of Jesus during the renaissance, the reformation era, the age of reason, and in the “old”, “new” and, now in North America, especially, “third quest” for the historical Jesus; the great diversity of “pictures” of Jesus among various “third questers”—and the likelihood that various agendas, such as frustration with church officialdom, etc., have more than a little influence on these pictures.

In their last two chapters, which bring the survey closer to the daily struggle for faith, the authors examine the quite different statements that

the Gospels, and Paul, make about the resurrection, and the even more divergent interpretations of these statements that come out of the various current theological camps.

What's lacking, of course, in such a broad and brief survey, is a sense of the fire and, yes, faith, that inform both the troubling conclusions of Crossan, Funk and others; and the strong, sometimes harsh, reactions of more conservative theologians. And the danger in depending upon even such an even-handed survey as this is that we may have already relegated the third-questers to history along with Reimarus, Renan, Schweizer and the rest. That would be sad, for we surely owe it to Christians struggling to find and hold a faith for the twenty-first century, to let our preaching and teaching show we too have struggled, and still believe.

Ted Heinze  
New Germany Lutheran Parish,  
New Germany, Nova Scotia

## **The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius**

Peter Widdicombe

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994

290 pp.

In a relatively small (ca. 250 pages of text) but costly volume, Peter Widdicombe, of McMaster University, offers a survey of the doctrine concerning divine fatherhood in the Alexandrian tradition. A central category of Christian thought, 'divine fatherhood was a notion received by Origen from his philosophical background as well as from Scripture. He deepened the notion through a systematic analysis of divine titles found in the Old Testament, and he thoroughly rooted it in the teaching of the New. Thus Origen became, in fact, the first proper theoretician of divine Trinity. Widdicombe seems to be at his best, when his careful and clear thinking unfolds the doctrinal implications of the Origenian construct (Part I, in particular chap. 3, pp. 63-92). Thus, for instance, he stresses Origen's emphasis on the *eternity* of fatherhood and sonship in God, a thesis which would again be a matter of dispute during the Arian controversies of the fourth century. The distinction of Father and Son being central in Origen's essay *On Prayer*, chapter 4 offers a genuine theological evaluation, rich in spiritual insights, of that essay.

After a needed transition through the very obscure beginnings of the Arian crisis (Part II), the bulk of the study (Part III, pp. 145-254) is devoted to a thoughtful and attractive description of Athanasius's synthesis. First, the philosophical and scriptural aspects of Athanasian thought are clarified in chapter 8; then divine fatherhood according to Athanasius is