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## Review: 'Jesus: Word Made Flesh'

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*The Future of Wisdom* deserves a place in a theological library and could be used as a textbook for graduate students but is probably beyond the grasp of most undergraduates.

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BRUCE H. LESCHER

*Jesus: Word Made Flesh.* By Gerard S. Sloyan. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. xiii + 194 pages. \$19.95 (paper).

“If Jesus is not a figure of human history, no one is,” insists Gerard Sloyan (179). But history remembers Jesus only because many, including the once hostile skeptic St. Paul, really believed that they had seen him alive after he died. This “absolute *novum* in human history” (149) changed everything. So Sloyan begins not with the “historical Jesus” but with “the Jesus the Church believed him to be from its earliest days” (182). This Jesus can only be understood in terms of Israel’s history and faith in God’s promises.

Sloyan has been thinking about Jesus for a long time. His eighth Christology book summons his experience and skill as theologian and exegete to present in seven chapters and an epilogue a richly textured Jesus, always adequate to the Church’s faith, whose “upraising” by God begins that faith. With the exception of the canonical gospels, early Christianity remembered Jesus as resurrected Lord and Christ rather than with reference to his public life as teacher and wonderworker. Emphasizing that God and not Jesus is “at the center of Christianity,” (1) Sloyan speaks more often of Jesus’ “upraising” by God than of his “resurrection.” This is an emphasis rather than an opposition and underlines the book’s main focus.

Years of dialogue with Jewish colleagues at Temple University shape Sloyan’s central concern to locate Jesus with respect to the people Israel. The “new” covenant of 1 Cor 11: 23–26, Sloyan translates as “renewed.” It is God’s renewal of the covenant first made with Abraham. Through faith in what God has done in raising up Jesus, the promise first made to Abraham that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed in his descendants is fulfilled. He reads Galatians and Romans to say that what is “new” about this renewed covenant is that it is “a covenant accepted by Jews and non-Jews and not the people of Israel alone” (47). It does not replace the covenant made with Moses. But neither does it bind non-Jews to what Philo called Torah’s “special laws” (56). Observance of them, moreover, even for baptized Jews, is “not considered essential to faith in God’s deed in Christ” (57). Sloyan sustains this reading throughout as he deals with such texts as the adversatives in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5.21–28) and *Ioudaïoi* in John. His careful argumentation offers a plausible biblical basis for some of John Paul II’s groundbreaking positions on relations between Israel and the Church.

Sloyan ends with Chalcedon and shows more sympathy for Antiochene positions and a different treatment of the hypostatic union than one might find in contemporary Christologists such as Gerald O’Collins. In keeping with the series’ format, critical apparatus are at a minimum, but Sloyan’s interlocutors are not far beneath the surface.

Suggestions for Further Reading let readers know where he is coming from exegetically. There is an Index of Scripture and Ancient Texts and an Index of Subjects and Persons. Clearly and engagingly written, this book is ideal for an undergraduate Christology course and a worthy summary of the author's lifetime of study and reflection.

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WILLIAM L. PORTIER

*The Gospel According to Mary: A New Testament for Women.* By Miriam Theresa Winter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009. 141 pages. \$15.00 (paper).

While it is generally recognized that women were among the inner circle of disciples that followed Jesus in Galilee and Judea, the canonical gospels note their presence only in passing (Mk 15:40–41, Mt 27:55–56, Lk 8:1–3, Jn 29:25). This book expands the story of these women by adding women into stories in which they are not mentioned or changing the gender of some male characters in the parables and the events in the gospels. For many women Christians this account of women in the ministry of Jesus will provide a valuable imaginative correction to the accounts that have marginalized women's presence and importance in the life of Jesus.

Scholars will recognize that this text is a gospel harmony. In this account Jesus is not as much the central character as the character that unites stories of women in his life, his parables and his ministry. The opening recasts the prologue of the fourth Gospel to speak of Jesus as Wisdom incarnate. God is recognized exclusively with female images and terms here and throughout the book. The second chapter, "Mary's Child," weaves together episodes from the first two chapters of Matthew and the second chapter of Luke. In this report, the wise visitors are women from Jerusalem who warn the family to flee and gift them with gold, frankincense and myrrh to pay for the journey. The book continues in a similar fashion including all variant accounts of events from the gospels that lend themselves to introducing more women. In her account of Jesus' call of the first disciples, in addition to Peter and Andrew, James and John, Winter's Jesus calls Mary Magdalene, Salome, the mother of James and John as Mark does not, another Mary, and Susanna to follow him as his disciples. Later Mary Magdalene is said to be the one who declares "You are God's Anointed" when Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say I am?" Winter also draws from the non-canonical gospel of Philip to report Peter's complaint that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene more than his male followers. For Winter's Jesus' question to the woman at the well in Samaria concerns the gods of different religions in Samaria; it is not really about her husbands. The text ends with an account of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. Winter names or describes twenty-nine women along with other women related to or from Galilee, Jerusalem, Jaffa, or the Judean countryside, whom she reports were present along with Peter, Jesus' brothers and other male disciples.

Winter's reconstruction could be a useful resource from which to assign students an exercise to locate the source(s) on which each incidence is based