

James D.G. DUNN. *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005. 136 pp. \$12.99.

This volume contains three lectures given by James Dunn at Acadia Divinity College. Dunn's presidential address for the 2002 meeting of the SNTS, later published in *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003) 139-175, appears as an appendix. The present work advances some of the conclusions from Dunn's more comprehensive *Jesus Remembered* (Eerdmans, 2003). With these lectures Dunn intends to critique three flaws in the "quest for the historical Jesus" and to offer a new perspective on Jesus that considers these issues. Specifically, the earlier quests have ignored the faith-creating impact of Jesus on his disciples from the outset, the oral culture in which the Jesus tradition has been preserved, and the characteristic Jesus within the context of Judaism.

In the first lecture, "The First Faith," Dunn argues that the proper "starting point for any quest for Jesus should be the historical fact that Jesus made a lasting impact on his disciples" (22). Previous quests for the historical Jesus have viewed faith with suspicion, removing expressions of faith from the Gospels in order to recover the historical Jesus. However, Dunn insists that, even if post-Easter faith has provided the present Gospel contexts for the Jesus tradition, the pre-Easter faith of the disciples has shaped the Jesus tradition from the beginning. Such a point is well illustrated in contemporary research of Q, which has often noted the absence of any passion narrative in Q and the Galilean character of Q material. Dunn contends that these features are more likely explained by the origin of the material during Jesus' Galilean mission and before Jesus' crucifixion.

In the second lecture, "Behind the Gospels," Dunn questions the primary conceptualization of the transmission of Jesus tradition through literary means (the two-source hypothesis). Instead, Dunn asserts that the earliest transmission of the Jesus tradition more likely occurred through oral processes common in first-century Palestine. Such transmission of oral material allows for the preservation of valued traditions that is both stable and flexible, and this oral process provides a helpful explanation for the variations in parallel accounts in the Synoptic Gospels (a point further developed and illustrated in the appendix, "Altering the Default Setting," 79-125).

In the third lecture, "The Characteristic Jesus," Dunn objects to looking for a distinct Jesus, one different from his own Jewish environment, through the use of criteria used to determine the probability that a particular saying derived directly from Jesus (dissimilarity, coherence, and multiple attestation). Instead, Dunn advocates a shift from the pursuit of a "distinctive" Jesus to a "characteristic" Jesus (63-70) and illustrates the effectiveness of such a search with five examples: the Jewish interests of Jesus, the circumstances of Jesus' Galilean homeland, the announcement of the kingdom of God, the Son of Man tradition, and the use of the term "Amen" (70-75).

Dunn's work presents a compelling critique of certain guiding assumptions used in contemporary Gospel research. The volume provides a helpful but brief overview of the last two hundred years of critical scholarship relating to Jesus and the Gospels. His "new perspective" on Jesus affirms the essential reliability of the Synoptic Gospels, but his comments on the transmission of oral material raise intriguing questions about "the idea(l) of an 'original' version" (50). The work would be useful as a supplementary text for graduate (or upper-level) courses in NT introduction or Gospels, but any detailed study in these areas should undoubtedly consult this volume.

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