

School of Religion

Faculty Publications and Presentations

Liberty University

Year 1999

Review: Jesus and the Logic of History

Gary R. Habermas
Liberty University, ghabermas@liberty.edu

BOOK REVIEWS

This text has the further strength of introducing the mono-linguists to the vast historiographic literature of other countries. As one would suspect in a text concerned with citations and commentary, the author is scrupulous in his own footnotes which reveal this to be a cosmopolitan history of scholarship drawn from English, French, German, Italian, and Latin sources.

At times, the author speculates beyond the evidence, inferring that ancient texts that are no longer extant "included not only coherent texts, but also considerable amounts of primary source material" (175). Grafton posits far greater Persian influence on western historiography than we have evidence for. Still, these are small concerns for such a well-conceived and constructed work, one that is perhaps above the level of an ordinary undergraduate but should be read by serious graduate students and scholars interested in the development of history in Western Europe and North America.

PAUL BARNETT, *Jesus and the Logic of History*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. 182. \$18.00.

Reviewed by Gary R. Habermas, Liberty University

Paul Barnett's latest volume is a contribution to the growing number of historical Jesus studies. However, several of Barnett's emphases differ markedly from so many of the others on the market.

In Chapter 1, he introduces the reader to the field of historical inquiry, including definitional matters, the use of source material in research, and the relation between history and the social sciences. His critique of sociological analyses of history, which often dominate contemporary studies of Jesus, is insightful.

Chapter 2 begins the historical survey of sources for Jesus by examining secular references, with an excursus on Josephus' famous *Testimonium Flavianum*. Turning to the earliest texts, Chapter 3 addresses the New Testament epistles in terms of what they tell us about the historical Jesus. The writings of Paul make up the bulk of the testimony (with an excursus that lists what we learn strictly from this apostle). James, 1 Peter, and Hebrews are also examined briefly, with Barnett viewing the overall results quite positively.

Beginning with a brief social analysis, Chapter 4 is primarily concerned with placing Jesus in his historical context by considering five notable persons mentioned in Luke 3:1-2, namely John the Baptist, Herod Antipas, Caiphas, Annas, and Pontius Pilate. An excursus addresses the way Pilate is viewed in several ancient sources.

Proclaiming that we must account for the "deity dimension" in the teachings of Jesus and the early church (92), Barnett traces in Chapter 5 the process of defining the crux of the early Christian faith. In particular, he concentrates on the path that led to the conclusion that Jesus was deity. An excursus deals with an overview of Jesus' ministry.

In Chapter 6, Barnett documents the spread of early Christianity by denoting specific developments over the first fifteen years after the death of Jesus. The author fills in the details from Paul's epistles. An excursus treats the resurrection of Jesus and how it served as the impetus for the truth of the Christian message.

One of the more creative treatments, Chapter 7 attempts to answer the question of how the early church got from Jesus' original teachings to the Gospels. Barnett works through four major apostolic movements centering around James (Jesus' brother), Peter, John, and Paul, noting the importance of preserving early, accurate tradition. The theme is that the apostles were careful both to safeguard Jesus' original teachings, as well as make relevant applications to early church situations.

A brief Chapter 8 is concerned with the unique role that is played by Jesus' death by crucifixion in the overall treatment of his life. Barnett claims that this aspect sets the life of Jesus apart from other ancient biographies. Chapter 9, the conclusion, is even more brief, listing nine major themes throughout the volume. A bibliography and two indices follow.

Throughout, Barnett interacts with recent, often scholarly, publications, distills them, and presents the results to the reader in an easy-to-digest fashion. He has command of a fairly large body of research, including many ancient historical parallels, much of it seldom discussed in the relevant literature. He always seems to find a way to line up the information in creative ways, being very convincing in his presentation of the known data. He utilizes the findings of critical scholarship (50, 81, 115), while still finding that the New Testament is accurate in its depiction of the career of Jesus.

Barnett's strongest emphasis is his recurring theme of continuity from Jesus to his followers, to the earliest church. Along the way, he includes several excellent discussions with regard to two of Paul's trips to Jerusalem (41-42, 121, 126-29), the basis for what he calls the four "interlocking apostolates" (133-34, 144) mentioned above, the giving and receiving of apostolic tradition (44-45, 50, 142-47), and the use of Paul's letters to confirm scenarios in the Gospels and Acts (91, 95, 133, 164).

The reader may sometimes struggle with fitting the chapters together into a cohesive whole, due to a fairly wide range of subject matter. But one still comes away with the impression that the data have been worked into a persuasive history of the earliest Christian community, especially until about AD 60, and then, to a lesser extent, through the end of the first century. Barnett does an excellent job of weaving all of this material together.

About the only major frustration this reviewer had was with the initial chapter that lays the historical foundation for the rest of the book. Given that the title of the volume speaks about "The Logic of History," and the back of the book states that it "provides a careful analysis of the historical methodology" and a "thorough investigation" of historiography and its link to theological method, I expected far more theory in the areas of philosophy of history and historiography. Here the volume is fairly sketchy. It hits and misses many relevant issues and the ones it does address usually seem to be scanty. As a result, the reader leaves with only a limited idea of these areas.

For example, most of Barnett's references to history are made by theologians or scripture scholars who comment on history instead of philosophers or historians who work in the technical areas. One-half page is given to a definition of history and less than two pages are given to the contemporary study of interpreta-

BOOK REVIEWS

tion, or historical hermeneutics. Crucial topics that could very profitably be linked to a study of the historical Jesus include the epistemology of history (including the objectivity of our knowledge concerning factual events), the actual tools of historiography, and so on. Granted, an entire volume or more could be done on these subjects, but a brief condensing of current scholarly opinion, consistent with the method Barnett employs throughout the remainder of the book, would have been a great addition.

Other caveats are minimal, such as the excursus on Jesus' resurrection. For instance, I wondered why Barnett considered the stolen body theory the "only . . . serious alternative explanation" (131). It is almost absent from the serious critical literature for over two hundred years!

But it is easy to be picky and I want these latter comments to be understood against the backdrop of the entire volume. Barnett has done us a service, sometimes filling gaps that are seldom addressed, especially in linking Jesus to his apostles and on to the New Testament writings as we have them. In recent discussions, it is the apostolic bridge that is so often ignored. As he points out, any theory of the historical Jesus is self-condemned if it does not explain the phenomena we have before us.

CARL A. VOLZ, *The Medieval Church: From the Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. Pp. 256. \$18.95.

Reviewed by John C. Eby, Loras College

Carl Volz's *The Medieval Church* is a traditional survey of institutional and biographical Church history for the period approximately between 500 and 1500. Although the table of contents promises an appealing thematic structure to the book as a whole, the organization of the work is predominantly, almost exclusively, strict chronological narrative. Seemingly intended for use as a classroom textbook, it nonetheless provides for the reader essentially an annotated timeline of names and events.

The absence of any preface, introduction, or conclusion immediately hints at the ambiguity of purpose or direction that the reader confronts throughout the work. There is no point in the whole volume where the reader is made clearly aware of any broad schematic integrity tying the diverse elements of medieval Christian experience together, and only occasionally is the reader guided in understanding the historical significance of events. Related to this is the confusing structure of the work as a whole; it is designed as a straightforward chronological narrative that often dissolves almost lecture-like (especially when discussing the early Middle Ages) into a mere list of names and accomplishments. One seeking a stronger interpretive structure should turn elsewhere to works such as Joseph Lynch's *Medieval Church*, R.W. Southern's *Western Society and the Church*, or even Jeffrey Russell's *Medieval Christianity*.

The book provides no bibliography, but rather relies upon haphazard citation of sources. More disturbing is the resounding silence of most of the leading scholarship from the past twenty years. Completely absent from the endnotes are a large