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## **Review: The Continuing Voice of Jesus: Christian Prophecy and the Gospel Tradition**

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A final characteristic of Morris' *Matthew* is its approachability. With many works this size, just to peruse the introductory material is to feel like you've been sat upon by an elephant. Then you get to the *really heavy* part. By contrast, while Morris' volume feels like 800 pages in your hands, it doesn't in your mind. His style is eminently readable and occasionally quite pastoral. It doesn't come off as heavy and overwhelming, but the content has not been sacrificed.

Having said all this, is there *really* a need for another nearly 800 page commentary on Matthew? Certainly, recent works as diverse as Gundry (1982), Carson (1984), Mounce (1985), France (1985), and Davies and Allison, Vol. 1 (1988), all have made their own unique contributions. However, there is still a place, even a *need*, for solid, even-handed readable commentary from a veteran master of the craft.

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*The Continuing Voice of Jesus: Christian Prophecy and the Gospel Tradition*, by M. Eugene Boring. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 303. \$18.95, paper.

This volume is an updated and "remodeled" (for a wider reading audience) version of Boring's *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition*, published in 1982 in the prestigious Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series. The author, recently appointed as Professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, has extensive background in this field through ongoing participation in Society of Biblical Literature seminars and other published articles, as well as his commentary on *Revelation* in the Interpretation series (John Knox, 1989).

Professor Boring's work is a rigorously consistent, if not exhaustive, example of recent New Testament critical scholarship that evangelicals should analyze with care. As in most of such cases, it is a field of "wheat and tares," with some of each "harvested" later in this review. However, before proceeding, two foundational points deserve explanation.

The first is a helpful clarification regarding the meaning of "prophecy" in this book (and throughout Scripture). Many evangelicals have tended to be pre-occupied with the predictive aspect of biblical prophecy. However, Boring correctly broadens the concept to include directly inspired speech toward the end of "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (1 Cor 14:3). He does not deny the eschatological "bottom line" of prophetic speech, but emphasizes primarily the role of prophets and their prophecies in shaping the wording of the Gospels (though the Fourth Gospel is handled only in passing) in general.

That leads to the second point of explanation. As necessary a corrective as Boring's expanded definition of prophecy is, his unquestioned critical methodology is a subjective exercise in undermining the straightforward

view that the apparent words of Jesus in the Gospel were in fact spoken by the Lord Himself.

Not that Boring is alone in such an enterprise. In an attempt to give credence to his methodology and views, Boring boasts, "No one except the most extreme uncritical fundamentalist attributes every word of the Gospels just as we have them to the historical Jesus" (192). Given the complexity and far-reaching consequences of the questions involved, that assertion *may* rank with the classic oversimplifications of all time. Also, given the quality and vigor of recent evangelical scholarship—not to mention the current evangelical majority in The Association of Theological Schools—it *does* rank with some of the colossal overstatements in the checkered history of biblical exegesis.

Having said that, this reviewer believes that *The Continuing Voice of Jesus* is still well worth the effort necessary for serious interaction with it. A literary analogy may help make that point. Recently, R. W. Richards, a Virginia historian, published a book entitled *A Southern Yarn*. It is an imaginative development of what might well have happened if the South had won the Civil War. There is, of course, only a modest basis in historical fact in the book. However, it is still thought-provoking reading in large measure.

Much the same can be said for Boring's volume. Even if the elaborate scenario of stages of Gospels composition and the bizarre, conflicting criteria used in "sorting out materials that may be attributed to Jesus" (193) are strongly discounted as to their validity and usefulness, it is still a fascinating thing to witness Boring's attempt to play Sherlock Holmes. If you buy into his assumptions and method, this book is a "gold mine." But, even if you don't, it is an immensely entertaining tour of the subterranean scriptural regions that liberal scholars confidently believe they can chart or dissect.

As to content, Boring introduces the issues and alternatives in chap. 1. Then, chaps. 2-5 (Part One) deal with "The Rediscovery of Christian Prophecy," defining prophecy and laying out the primary biblical and extra-biblical sources. Chaps. 6-10 (Part Two) give "A Profile of Early Christian Prophecy," describing the major roles the New Testament prophet played. Much of the first two sections are well done, informative, and (positively) provocative.

Unfortunately, the same evaluation cannot be rendered for chaps. 11-17 (Part Three), "Prophetic Sayings of the Risen Jesus in the Gospels." After admitting the controversial and difficult nature of his task in a midstream "Note on Method" (189-90), Boring proceeds to build a critical house of cards in his attempt to locate words put in Jesus' mouth by the Gospel writers versus what either the pre- or post-Easter Christ actually said. Fully aware that "those moves are hypothetical and increasingly speculative," the author still buoyantly concludes that his procedure is "necessary," and the only viable way to go (190).

The most obvious pointer to Boring's scholarly "dream world" is his lengthy chapter on "Prophetic Sayings of the Risen Jesus in Q." That chapter is longer (191-234) than the rest of Part Three combined. With absolutely no objective evidence at his disposal, Boring claims that Q had "editions" of a sort (192), embarking on a journey that would be difficult with a clear road map, much less a murky, unproven theory like "Q." (This is a sobering re-

minder that an idea repeated often enough can achieve “fact” status in minds so disposed, no matter how flimsy and illusory the evidence!)

Even if other evangelical readers would not find the same stimulus for thought that this reviewer did in reading *The Continuing Voice of Jesus*, it should be stated that the “Selected Bibliography” (273–87) is almost worth the price of the volume. Any defects in Professor Boring’s method or resulting conclusions are certainly not attributable to a lack of research. You may not like the way he plays the game, but he certainly knows his way around in this ballpark!

All in all, it is fair to say that *The Continuing Voice of Jesus* is an important work with which evangelicals should be thoroughly familiar. Like the views of each successive generation of liberal scholarship, it will inevitably be bumped from the status of “assured findings” to the academic ash heap by the onslaught of newer critical outlooks and methods. However, for the time being, it certainly ranks toward the top of the list in its field. (In that regard, it might be helpful to consult the related works of evangelical scholars like D. E. Aune, G. F. Hawthorne, E. E. Ellis, and W. Grudem.)

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*From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology*, by Maurice Casey. Louisville: John Knox/Westminster, 1991. Pp. 197. \$21.00.

This work by the lecturer in theology at the University of Nottingham attempts to describe how New Testament Christology developed because of the needs of community identity. Casey believes that the primary motivating factor in the development of the move to a high Christology of deity for Jesus was the shift in the makeup of the church from a Jewish community to a Gentile one.

Casey first describes what features make up religious and ethnic identity in Judaism and among Gentiles. Then he works “back to front” through the biblical evidence, as he first discusses why John’s Gospel belongs at the end of the development and so John’s portrait of Jesus cannot be taken as helpful in assessing the roots of where Christological development started. Casey then turns his attention to the major Christological titles of Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man. He argues that Son of God originally referred to Jesus as a holy person, but not an ontologically unique person. Messiah was applied to Jesus by mockers at the cross, and Son of Man was not a title for Jesus. The early church developed all these titles in a more focused and exalted direction. To make this point Casey repeatedly strips away those elements of the gospel tradition that are unique to Matthew and Luke as later reflections of the theology of the church of the writers’ period. He often relies on the sayings that come to us from Mark or from “Q,” that is, those sayings shared by Matthew and Luke. For Casey, Jesus was a Jewish prophet and presented