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Review: Life in the Face of Death

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outset. Various modern theologians, notably Pannenberg, are quoted and their differing grounds for rejecting the virgin birth are considered to overturn both the traditional Protestant view, represented here by Luther, as well as the more wide-ranging doctrinal pronouncements made about Mary by the Roman Catholic Church. Confessional Protestants accept that Mary was the mother of God – Cyril's *theotokos* – and to this Roman Catholics add three further articles faith: the perpetual virginity, the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption of Mary. Of interest to students of the Reformation will be Luedemann's discussion of how Luther accepted the perpetual virginity as biblical but rejected the immaculate conception as not; the third point only became official dogma in 1950.

The second part of the book is likely to be of most interest to *Themelios* readers. Here Luedemann goes through the early sources in chronological order. Paul knows that Jesus was born of a woman; Mark gives her a name and a family, thereby seeking to neutralise the morally problematic absence of any mention of a father. Matthew, Luke and John all delete Mark's problematic phrase, 'Son of Mary'. Matthew and Luke go further by introducing Joseph (albeit at different points) and making him Jesus' father, so responding to Jewish criticism of Jesus' premarital birth. Luedemann suggests that the historical basis for this may be that Joseph adopted Mary's son who was conceived as a result of premarital rape. Christology develops in parallel with this defence against criticism. Thus the role of the Holy Spirit in the conception is the result of the Palestinian title 'Son of God' being reinterpreted in a Hellenistic environment. By endorsing the perpetual virginity of Mary even after the birth, the *Protevangelium of James* (a second century infancy gospel) only continues the development

that Luedemann traces in the canonical texts.

At no point however does Luedemann interact critically with confessional scholarship that differs from him. Simply to rule them out of court is not an academic approach, and here his passion overtakes his erudition. Thus Werner Keller, as someone who seeks to defend the historicity of the Bible, is a soft target to hit. Luedemann tries to accentuate the differences between the Matthean and Lucan birth narratives, but at no point even acknowledges, let alone refutes, the points of correspondence identified by Brown in his *Birth of the Messiah* (1993), page 34.

Students looking for a balanced historical and theological approach to the Virgin Mary and the virginal conception would be much better looking at collections of essays such as *Mary in the New Testament*, edited by R.E. Brown and others, or *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, editor, D.F. Wright. Their historical investigation is shown to be no enemy of faith and orthodox belief. Luedemann's refusal to give such scholars a voice is just as imperialistic as his understanding of the German churches whom he critiques.

Andrew Gregory
Oxford

**Life in the Face of Death:
The Resurrection Message of the
New Testament McMaster NT Series**

Richard N. Longenecker (ed.)
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998,
x + 314 pp., \$22.00/£12.99

Some evangelicals may be surprised, but Scripture relates the resurrection of Jesus to far more subjects than just apologetics and soteriology! The third text in the McMaster New Testament series addresses the significance of this event 'for the living of life, the facing of death, and the

longing for the future after death', as editor Richard Longenecker states in the Preface. Thus it 'resonates with most of the deepest concerns of the human consciousness' (ix). This volume is popularly written by distilling the best of the academy for believers, in order to help them in their Christian pilgrimage as they face death (x).

Eleven distinguished scholars contribute to a text that includes four sections: background, Jesus, Paul, and the early church. After Longenecker's Preface and Introduction, the background chapters deal with death and the afterlife in several ancient cultures. Edwin Yamauchi addresses the subject in the ancient near east, Peter Bolt in the Greco-Roman world and Richard Bauckham in Second Temple Judaism. The chapters on the teachings of Jesus include Donald Hagner's treatment of resurrection in the synoptic Gospels and Andrew Lincoln's exploration of John.

The section on Paul includes studies of the relation between resurrection and immortality by Murray Harris, whether Paul's view changed by Richard Longenecker, and G. Walter Hansen's analysis of Jesus' resurrection as a basis for the Christian life and ethics. Early church issues include Joel Green addressing the impetus that Jesus' resurrection gave to discipleship and mission in Acts. William Lane considers Christian living in the face of death and persecution in Hebrews. Allison Trites treats the Book of Revelation's encouragement to believers in their confrontation with persecution and other tough times.

This book is simply packed with relevant information. It is a masterful overview bringing years of research to an intelligent, though general, audience. Most of the authors have published previously on their topics. While each chapter includes a selected bibliography, no footnotes or endnotes are given. Citations of

sources – both ancient and modern – are sprinkled throughout the text. Some authors (like Yamauchi, Bolt, and Bauckham) use this option more frequently.

The three background chapters provide a wealth of extra-biblical sources, traditions, and beliefs existing in contrast throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Yamauchi's treatment of the mystery religions (especially 30–32) and his critique of the popular view that Judaism borrowed its views on the resurrection of the body from Zoroastrianism (39–42, 47–49) are among the most instructive portions of the entire book. The same is true, to a lesser extent, of Bolt's mention of apotheosis (70–72).

The remainder of the volume is basically a NT biblical theology of resurrection – both Jesus' and the believer's. Along the way the reader is given plenty of helpful instructions for Christian living. Harris' entire chapter is a brilliant comparison of the differences and similarities between resurrection and immortality that is a real encouragement for the believer's eternal hope in Jesus Christ.

Following the theme of the book, other snippets provide fertile ground for further development and application. Hansen's thoughts on the relation between Jesus' resurrection and Christian ethics (206–209) and breaking sinful habits (212–13), Green's linking this event to mission (239) and feeding the hungry (242), are examples. So is the encouragement provided by both Lane (254) and Trites (281–282) to stand firm during tough times. Many of these comments are devotional in nature. I was puzzled, however, that Lane had virtually nothing to say about Hebrews 2:14–15, given the theme of his chapter and the excellent opportunity for application.

The book also highlights prominent themes from recent theological discussions—like the centrality of the

Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching (118–19), the dominance of Jesus' resurrection throughout the New Testament (99, 122, 147), and the argument that this event confirmed Jesus' person and message (118–20, 208, 244–45). Almost every theological chapter discusses various aspects of the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and that of believers.

The use of critical methods is obvious throughout the volume, although not flagrant. I also wondered about the stated goal of writing popularly to assist believers in their pilgrimage through life and towards death. The application is there, but most frequently not 'delivered' in the way that I think the average, intelligent reader might want it. While there are certainly many wonderful insights, some who read the Preface or the back of the book may wonder how *actually to bring home* these lessons in real life. How are these fears quelled, or at least eased?

Still, for those who want to be both challenged and blessed by many aspects concerning Jesus' resurrection beyond those normally discussed in evangelical volumes, this text is a treasure. Although some careful thinking needs to be done, much is contained here that might be crafted in the direction of further application.

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The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide

G. Theissen & A. Merz
London: SCM, 1998,
xxix + 642 pp., £25

Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History

J Gnilka,
Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997,
xiii + 346 pp., £16.99

The Contemporary Jesus

J J Altizer,
London: SCM, 1998,
xxvii + 225 pp., £14.95

Of the writing of books about Jesus of Nazareth there is seemingly no end. Indeed it is probably true that Jesus Research is one of the most vibrant furrows of New Testament scholarship as we approach the New Millennium. Each of the volumes under review here contributes in a distinct way to the current state of the quest for the historical Jesus. Joachim Gnilka, for instance, offers us not so much a portrait of the historical Jesus but a set of contours by which to understand the impact made by the artisan from Nazareth.

Theissen's *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* is exactly as its title describes. It covers briefly the initial phases of the Jesus Quest before analysing in detail and evaluating the sources we have for piecing together a life of Jesus. Part 2 of the book (125–85), which is a *Sitz im Leben* for the life of Jesus, is perhaps the most stimulating. It covers Second Temple Judaism, a historical chronology for Jesus' life, as well as providing a geographical and social framework. Given that Theissen dialogues primarily with Anglo-Saxon scholarship, readers will be surprised that there is no interaction with N.T. Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, 1993). This is not excusable given that the German