

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: In Search of Jesus: Insider and Outsider Images

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alınmıştır. Türkiye’de din eğitiminin yasal dayanakları, örgün din eğitiminin tarihçesi, bugünkü durumu, problemleri, meslekî din eğitimi faaliyetleri, imam hatip liselerinin tarihî seyri, sosyal fonksiyonları, ilâhiyat fakülteleri ve öğretmen yetiştirme programları, yaygın din eğitimi faaliyetleri, camide ve cami dışında yürütülen çalışmalar, yurt dışındaki vatandaşlarımıza yönelik çalışmalar vs. Türkiye’de din eğitimi faaliyetlerinin ana hatları olarak ele alınmıştır. Yazar, bu bölümü destekler mahiyette kitabın sonunda bir de ekler bölümüne yer vermiş ve Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu, A. H. Akseki’nin din tedrisatı ve din müesseseleri hakkındaki raporu, ilahiyat fakültesi öğretim üyelerinin reform teklifleri, 1992 *Tebliğler Dergisi*’nde yayınlanan “Din Kültürü ve Ahlâk Bilgisi Öğretiminin Genel İlkeleri”, “I. Din Şurası Kararları” burada yer almıştır.

Din eğitimi çalışmalarında tek yanlı kararlar ve subjektif yargılar yerine, toplum gerçeklerini göz önüne alan bütüncül yaklaşımların gerekli olduğuna, bunun için ülkemizde gerek bilimsel alanda gerekse uygulama alanında neler yapılmakta olduğunun genel bir portresinin bilinmesine ihtiyaç olduğu fikrinden hareketle kaleme alınan eser, alanın bütünü hakkında genel bilgi sahibi olmak isteyenler için faydalı bir çalışmadır. Ayrıca eserin, Türkiye’de nispeten yeni bir saha olan din eğitimi araştırmacıları için de tartışma ortamı hazırladığı düşünülebilir.

Z. Şeyma Arslan

In Search of Jesus: Insider and Outsider Images, Clinton Benneth.

London: Continuum, 2001. 403 pp.

The book under review seems to be a useful anthology for those who are interested in the question of who Jesus was and how he has been understood by both insiders and outsiders (i.e. Christians and non-Christians) over the course of time.

In his introduction, the author tries to explain the rationality behind writing this book. After giving some information about his previous books, “In Search of the Sacred” and “In Search of Muhammad,” he indicates some parallel points between his books on Muhammad and Jesus. In so doing, he states that in “In Search of Muhammad” more attention has been paid to outside voices than insiders because of the uniformity of the insiders’ stories. According

to the author, while the Christian insiders have different stories about Jesus, the Muslim insiders tell more or less the same story about Muhammad. The reason for this, he says, is that while the Christian insiders are more skeptical about the historical reliability of the texts about Jesus, the Muslims are convinced of the value and reliability of the sources about Muhammad. It seems to me that in this way the author is implying that while Muslim insiders have a subjective view concerning Muslim sources about Muhammad, the Christian believers have an objective view concerning the Christian sources about Jesus. But it is well-known that the reason for the differing opinions of the Christian insiders concerning Jesus is that while the Canonic Gospels are considered to be the most reliable sources relating the life of Jesus, as Bultmann and other renown Christian scholars have emphasized, very little can be said about historical Jesus if one depends on them. On the other hand, when we turn to the first Islamic sources, the sirah books, both Muslim insiders and non-Muslim outsiders accept that it is possible to expose the life of the historical Muhammad, even though there are some aspects of his life that differ, such as his private family life and the miracles he performed. Also, the author argues that while the Christian insiders have applied modern scientific methods to the Gospels since the Enlightenment, the Muslim insiders are still hesitant to apply these methods to the Qur'an. It seems to me, that while stating this, the author is forgetting the fact that it is impossible to make a comparison between the Qur'an and the Gospels. For that reason, it would be better to make comparison between the Qur'an and Jesus-Christ with regard to their function for their society.

I would like to continue here to explain some important points in the book. First of all, it should be accepted that in this book Clinton Benneth presents a good and useful anthology, not only for Christians, but also for those who are interested in different images of Jesus, from all the world religions. The author deserves to be congratulated and applauded for achieving this.

In the first section, the author explores the available sources for the life of Jesus; he first starts with views of nonChristian historians, such as Josephus and Tacitus. He then proceeds to investigate the Jewish sources in order to present to the reader the world that Jesus came from. Thirdly, he then introduces the reader to the noncanonic and canonic gospels and other documents, such as the Nag Hammadi Library and the Dead Sea Scrolls. When this section is thoroughly examined, we can see that some nonChristian

sources namely, Mandeian, Manicheist, and Islamic sources, are not explored here.

In the second chapter, after scanning the traditional images of Jesus from the early Christians up to the Enlightenment, the author produces some introductory information about the quest of the historical Jesus as a preparation for the third chapter; here he surveys the views of those who are in favor of displaying who the real Jesus was, what his main message was and what happened to him by making a distinction between the human Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of the church tradition.

In the third chapter, the author reviews the studies which intended to look behind the church dogma for the 'authentic' Jesus, starting with the views of Reimarus, and continuing up to the studies of the Jesus Seminary, established in 1985; this seminary was established to rescue Jesus and the Gospels than that presented by the evangelic Christians, who believe that the Gospel statements are literally the word of God. By doing this, the author surveys a number of different images of Jesus, referring both to some distinguished scholars of the first half of the twentieth century and some renowned contemporary scholars, such as Borg, Crossan, Sanders, Theissen, and Sobrino. In this section, the author gives some brief information concerning the works and findings of the Jesus Seminary. But when the projects and works of this institution are examined, for example, *The Five Gospels* and *The Acts of Jesus*, it seems that the findings of the Jesus Seminary deserve to be evaluated more deeply if one wishes to determine who Jesus was, what his message was, and what happened to him. Also, it seems to me that the christologies of pluralist Christian theologians, such as John Hick, Paul F. Knitter, and Leonard Swidler should have been examined in this chapter as well.

In the fourth chapter the author observes the views of outsiders, starting with the pagan writers, such as Celsus. He then goes on to highlight some important points made by those whose views resembled the early pagan assessments. The most interesting point in this chapter is the definition of what an outsider is. Into this category the author puts those who distance themselves from mainstream Christianity or those whose views explicitly contradict conventional Christian beliefs. It seems to me that this kind of judgment is unfair; we have no right to judge into which category someone who has different opinions concerning our faith or the main elements of our faith falls.

In the fifth chapter the author examines the Jewish and Muslim images of Jesus. In doing this, he first of all indicates that although the Jews regarded Jesus as a Jew and accepted his concept of God or his teachings about God, they rejected the Messianism of Jesus. Also, according to those Jewish scholars who lived after Jesus, whose views are surveyed in this chapter, St. Paul had moved Jesus' Godcentered teaching to a Christcentered one. Thus, the dispute between the first century Palestinian Jews, particularly the Pharisees, was mostly political rather than theological. In short, according to the accounts in this chapter concerning the Jewish images of Jesus, he was a loyal but reforming Jew. In the second part of this chapter, Clinton Benneth goes on to study the Muslim images of Jesus. In doing so, after giving brief information about the Muslim understanding of prophethood, he argues that Muslims developed "a preexisting light (nur) resting on Muhammad" and thus in popular Muslim piety, Muhammad had been elevated to a semidivine status. In this point the author is right. But he is wrong to give the impression that this sort of understanding is widespread among Muslims. It is well-known that only a small number of Muslims today have this belief about Muhammad. On p.273 the author states that "Muslims do not have any difficulty believing that Jesus survived the crucifixion, or that he showed himself to his disciples before God raised him up to heaven"; this is a reference to the novel of an Egyptian surgeon. This argument does not reflect the truth. Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified and survived. According to the mainstream Muslim view he was not crucified, but someone, namely Judas, made a likeness of him and this was crucified instead. Some other Muslims, including myself, believe that God rescued Jesus from the crucifixion. But later on he had passed away. But we do not know where and how he died. The end result is that Jesus is dead and he will never come back. Briefly, the author not only has given insufficient information about the event of crucifixion, but he has also presented his views as being the common Muslim view. The author also fails to discuss the views of some contemporary scholars, such as Ismail Balic, Muhammad M. Ayoub, S.H. Nasr, Ali Merad, and those who think like them. In short, in our examination of Benneth's presentation of the Muslim images of Jesus, we come to realize that it does not properly represent the Muslim images. It seems to me that the author has emphasized some Muslim images that are similar or somehow support the Christian image of Jesus.

In the sixth chapter, Clinton Benneth deals with the Hindu and the Buddhist images of Jesus. When we examine this chapter in depth, we get the impression that he has tried to give information about the Hindu and Buddhist beliefs rather than the Hindu and Buddhist images of Jesus. The most significant points of this chapter are that among the Hindus and the Buddhists, Jesus is understood not in the light of conventional Christian terms and traditional biblical categories, but rather in the light of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. In this sense, Jesus is considered to be a divine teacher, an avatara, or as a manifestation of the divine Buddha.

After surveying the insider and outsider images of Jesus, in the concluding section the author reaches the same conclusion as those of Albert Schweitzer in his significant quest for a historical Jesus. As is well known, in his magnum opus *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1926), after examining the different images of Jesus up to his own time, Schweitzer concluded that there were as many images of Jesus as there were studies into the matter of Jesus, but none of these reflected the same Jesus. Similarly, Benneth, too, at the beginning his conclusion argues that at the conclusion of his research he had realized that “any attempt to domesticate Jesus is doomed to failure.” By stating this he gives the same impression that Schweitzer does, namely that every researcher into Jesus tries to understand Jesus in the light of their own circumstances and cultural background. It seems to me that in order to determine who Jesus really was, for both insider and outsider scholars, the issue of Jesus should not only be handled in the light of theological methods, but also in the light of the historical method. For that reason, researchers need to take into account the works and findings of the Jesus Seminary, which has carried out much research into the historical Jesus, not only to criticize them, but also to learn from them. It seems to me that Benneth’s work suffers from a serious deficiency, due to the underestimation of the works of the Jesus Seminary.

After investigating all the different issues concerning this book, we can conclude that *In Search of Jesus* provides a helpful onevolume overview of the insider and outsider images of Jesus for those who are interested in how Jesus is understood by those who have a different worldview. It is a sensitive portrayal, which puts the reader in touch with the realities of rich Jesus images, both in the eyes of insiders and in the eyes of outsiders.

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