

REVIEW ESSAYS

The "Real Jesus" in Debate

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A primary objective of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* is to foster biblical scholarship that respects biblical literature as Scripture and willingly engages, rather than resists, its religious dimension. Professor Luke Timothy Johnson's recently published *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) is a book that speaks directly to issues with which the Institute for Biblical Research and the Bulletin are very much concerned. Interest in Johnson's book was keen from the start, with the 500 advanced copies available at HarperCollins's display table sold out by the second day of the 1995 SBL meeting in Philadelphia. (I was one of the disappointed ones who had to wait until the following January to receive his copy.) Sales continue to be strong, and the issues raised by this book continue to be discussed.

In one of its sessions during the 1996 SBL meeting in New Orleans the Historical Jesus Section held a panel discussion of *The Real Jesus*. The reviewers were Adela Yarbro Collins and Walter Wink. The latter is a member of the much publicized—and much maligned—Jesus Seminar. Professor Collins is the author of *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) and is currently writing the Hermeneia commentary on the Gospel of Mark. She has many other publications, including important studies in Christian apocalyptic. Professor Wink's *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) has become a standard in Gospel research. Wink's interests in the personal relevance of Scripture is amply attested in such books as *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), and *Transforming Biblical Study* (2 vols., Nashville: Abingdon, 1990). Wink's review is delightfully humorous, as well as insightful, and should go a long way toward dispelling the canard that biblical scholarship is dull.

Following the reviews by Collins and Wink, Professor Johnson responds. Johnson is the author of numerous works, including commentaries such as *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991) and *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Knox Preaching Guides; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987). His books *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 9; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) and *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) attest to Johnson's commitment to Christian faith and to the relevance and value of Scripture.

As editor of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* I take great pleasure in presenting these reviews and response. In my judgment the various issues touched upon and the approaches the participants have taken in grappling with them expose important aspects of the assumptions, presuppositions, philosophies, and methods underlying biblical research in general and historical Jesus research in particular. It is hoped that the *Bulletin's* readership will find these essays stimulating and thought provoking.

Was Jesus a real man who lived 2000 years ago? Historians, artifacts and eyewitness accounts lead mainstream scholars to believe he did really exist, and there is historical evidence for his existence. Whether or not he is divine is another discussion. The science on the dating and origins the Shroud is very much being debated and doesn't generally support the claims. Another famous relic of dubious authenticity is The True Cross . There are hundreds of fragments of wood claimed by various people throughout history as being from the cross used in the Crucifixion of Jesus. Based on the evidence we have, can anyone with certainty say Jesus really existed about 2,000 years ago? Worshippers on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter, celebrate the Miracle of the Holy Fire at Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A flame is said to spontaneously emanate from the stone slab inside the chapel, or Edicule, marking the site of Christ's burial and Resurrection. PHOTO GALLERY. Click to explore portrayals of Jesus, which range from Roman-era frescoes to a modern forensic reconstruction. This story appears in the December 2017 issue of National Geographic magazine. Watch on National Geographic: Modern scientists investigate ancient traditions in Secrets of Christ™s