

Oumou Terra

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Book review

David Flusser with R. Steven Notley, *The sage from Galilee: rediscovering Jesus'* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). 221 pp. pbk. US\$20.00

The work is a revised and updated version of David Flusser's 1968 work *Jesus in selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* that was later translated into English as *Jesus* (Magnet Press, 1997). Flusser himself contributed to the revisions presented in this work yet his former student R. Steven Notley assisted in expanding and revising his material. Flusser notes that this revision has benefited from his extensive work on Jesus since the previous edition. Flusser writes, the sage from Galilee remains not merely longer, but also significantly better than its German forerunner (p. xvii). Flusser's portrait is unique within historical Jesus' research in that he is a Jewish scholar approaching Jesus and the Gospel within their Jewish contexts. Coming from this perspective, Flusser offers a compelling presentation of Jesus in his contemporary milieu. At the same time, Flusser faces the dilemma of most historical Jesus research: the tendency to impose one's own view or perspective on Jesus, a point made long ago by Albert Schweitzer. After a foreword and preface by Notley and Flusser respectively and an introduction by James H. Charlesworth, *The Sage from Galilee* is divided into eleven chapters with an epilogue. The first chapter, *Sources*, sets forth the foundation and method for Flusser's biographical sketch of Jesus. Here he makes two observations that are certainly devices within wider historical Jesus' scholarship. Flusser puts forward a theory that the Synoptic Gospels are based upon earlier documents originally written in Hebrew, translated into Greek, and passed through different phases of redaction on page 3. Throughout the work, then, Flusser is able to draw upon the Hebrew when discussing Jesus' sayings. Secondly, Flusser argues that the Luke Gospel presents the most primitive tradition from Mark and Matthew. Where Matthew departs from Mark, according to Flusser, he is preserving the earlier source that lies behind Luke. The Mark Gospel as well as John, is used mainly where it can be shown to present an authentic account. There is not much in this section on why or how Flusser comes to these conclusions.

The second chapter, *Ancestry*, places Jesus firmly within his Jewish milieu. Flusser draws heavily from the Gospel of Luke and Matthew alongside the works of Josephus to portray the religious and the sociological backdrop for Jesus and his ministry. Flusser works with his sources so it is difficult to tell how he affirms some aspects while denying others. Since the genealogies in Luke and Matthew, for example, reveal the intent to link Jesus as Messiah to David, they are considered unhistorical and unreliable. Similarly, the setting of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem reflects an intention to connect Jesus to Jewish messianic expectation. Flusser seems to allow Luke 2:22-4 and even the virgin birth to be historical. Flusser uses Josephus' reference to Jesus in Ant. 18:63-64 to identify him as a Jewish sage, which, from Flusser's perspective, challenges the popular notion that Jesus was a simple peasant. The next several chapters place Jesus' teaching and ministry within the context of Second Temple Judaism. Flusser connects Jesus with the preaching of John the Baptist, who share the Essenes' view of the Baptist. Flusser brings out a dynamic that is

given fuller articulation in the seventh chapter Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus and John the Baptist held differing messianic views.

For sure this work strong contribution to the more recent Trent in history call Jesus scholarship that place Jesus within through , practice and expectations of the various group within second temple Judaism.

Flusser work is not without its problems. As mention before the Athir work from a standpoint of Lukan priority and the view that the gospel were translated from Hebrew. However there can be or not a discussion of how Flusser reach these conclusion , that they remain dubious in their application . further, there is often no elaboration on how Flusser can present certain material from the Gospel has historical and other part not. Statement that a certain passage has an authentic ring about it p.109 rarely are supported by any criteria for such a decision. For example , Flusser states that he is convinced that there are reliable report. That the crucified Jesus appeared to hundreds of people as attested in 1 cor.15.3-8 page 144, yet we have left the dark as to how he came to be convinced. In other instances, Flusser is contend abandoning certain material such as Jesus' birth , since it supports an identifiable agenda on behalf of its Authors.

The sage From Galilee offers a refreshing portrait of the historical Jesus that will serve as a welcome supplement to other studies on the subject. Many readers wherever they fall on the theological spectrum will become frustrated with Flusser lack of methodology and criteria for authenticity. Flusser writes with a large arsenal of classic and Jewish sources that draws out the appropriate background for the Gospels presentation of Jesus.