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Book Review on *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*

New Testament Literature

*The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*, written by David Flusser and R. Steven Notley, is a short novel on the story of Jesus and his works and message. Published under this title in 2007, the purpose of this book is to show the possibility of writing the story of Jesus' life, which is typically found in the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The content of this book helps put the first four books of the New Testament into a more historical perspective as opposed to the more faith-based perspective many read from, whether it be during church or worship gatherings or personal devotion. Through this book, the author is attempting to present the historical life of Jesus directly to the reader.

In the first chapter of the book titled "Sources", Flusser provides a lot of information regarding Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that gives way to a new perspective on the four gospels. In this chapter, Flusser presents the effectiveness of the four gospels in terms of historical accuracy and portrayal of Jesus' life. Flusser argues that "Luke and Matthew together provide the most authentic portrayal of Jesus' life and teachings." To support this argument, the author discusses the purpose of the gospels, the differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel according to John, and the timeline of when each gospel was written. For example, Flusser states, "A critical reevaluation of the literary evidence thus indicates that Luke wrote before Mark. Mark then reworked the gospel material and unfavorably influenced Matthew, who

followed Mark's version closely." (p. 4) Each gospel had a similar yet different purpose, which resulted in the different levels of effectiveness the author draws upon in this chapter. The author talks about how the Gospel according to John presents Jesus in a more kerygmatic way as opposed to the historical way the Synoptic Gospel portrays Jesus. For instance, Flusser argues, "The only gospel that teaches a post-Easter Christology is the Gospel according to St. John, and it is of less historical value than the three Synoptic Gospels. The Jesus portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels is, therefore, the historical Jesus, not the "kerygmatic Christ." (p. 3) Based on these two examples and other evidence the author provides in this chapter, I would say his argument is very convincing. Based on my own readings and knowledge of the gospels, I could see how the Synoptic Gospels are more historical-based, while the Gospel according to John is more faith-based.

In the chapter titled "Love," the author reveals what Christ's relationship to loving others is and his message on love. Towards the end of the chapter, Flusser states, "It was not simply his total way of life that urged Jesus to express loving devotion to sinners; this inclination was deeply linked with the purpose of his message." (p. 61) In this chapter, the author is trying to argue that Christ's message of love was not something new to his followers or the Jewish community. The main portion of his message on love dates back to the Old Testament and the commandment "love your neighbor as thyself". To support this argument, the author uses the example from Matthew 22:35–40, when Jesus referred to the Old Testament commandment when "explaining the sum and substance of the Law of Moses." (p. 61) In those verses, Jesus draws on Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Flusser concludes this passage by stating, "It is almost certain that here Jesus was teaching an older tradition because he saw it as important to his own message." (p. 61) The author's argument in this chapter was very convincing due to the

fact that Jesus himself says, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as being well-versed in Old Testament scripture and coming to help others uphold the law. It was clear that the author believes that Jesus' main focus in the law was to portray love above all else to his followers.

The author's argument in the chapter "The Son" is that Jesus was truly the only son of God and that his sonship carries serious weight. In the beginning of the chapter, the author reveals how there were other men who were considered miracle-workers like Christ. These men were also called sons of God, but their sonship wasn't on the same level as Jesus' sonship. Their sonship also did not carry the same burden of death that Jesus' sonship did. To show this, Flusser uses the story in Luke when Jesus went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. Flusser recalls, "Then a cloud came and overshadowed them, and a voice out of the cloud said, "This is my only Son; hear him." (p. 103) In this statement from the Gospel according to Luke, God identifies Jesus as his only Son, which ties into the purpose of Jesus even being on earth. The author also states that "Jesus' sonship therefore leads, not to life, but to the death that other prophets before him had suffered. His awareness of the sonship of God was linked with the premonition that he had to die." The author draws on many examples from the Old Testament and other rabbinic literature to support his stance about Jesus' sonship. His argument is convincing because no other man held this title and experienced what Christ experienced. It is only through Jesus that we can be children of God without having to go through the persecution that he did.

The overall argument of this book is convincing, and the author uses a substantial amount of evidence to support and elaborate his point of view. In addition, the overall mission of the

book was successful. The author really portrayed the life of Jesus in novel form efficiently and gave readers a deeper understanding of Jesus as well as the gospels in the New Testament. Reading this book has broadened my knowledge of Jesus and connected a lot of ideas and premises that I've read in the New Testament to practical life. To conclude, this book really expands the reader's knowledge of Christ, his mission, his life, and even some of his potential thoughts. It is beneficial when trying to dig deeper into the meaning of the gospels of the New Testament.

## Works Cited

Flusser, David, and Steven Notley. *The Sage From Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*. 2007. Bowker, <https://doi.org/10.1604/9780802825872>.