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Sristi M. Pandey

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Dr. Jeffrey Garcia

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Book Review on “The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius”

The book overall was very insightful as it gave background and understanding of Jesus from perspective of Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), John, and comparing it to the author’s own perspective given his additional knowledge of the Jewish culture and history. David Flusser’s approach is fresh and one of a kind. He denotes that he does not like how Jesus is compared and contrasted as “historical” Jesus and “kerygmatic” Christ. Thus, he argues that Jesus was not only a Jew but wanted to stay within the faith of the Jewish, and that he personally identifies himself with Jesus’ Jewish worldview, both moral and political which he believes had the potential to change our world and prevent the greatest part of evil and suffering (p. xviii).

Flusser’s approach is a fresh breath of air than that from other scholars in that, firstly, he himself is a Jew and he also studied the ancient Judaism. However, he does not write with a Jewish standpoint but with a classic standpoint. He uses conservative approach which was neither of a Jewish nor a Christian theologian but of someone with studies of Greek and Latin text. This gives his contexts a huge advantage point than that of the other writers’ context and concept of Jesus.

The other reason Flusser’s view point of Jesus stand out from other’s perception of Jesus is that Flusser’s perspective of Jesus’ concept of love; Jesus elevated the concept of love. While Jewish law always recognized and prioritized importance of love (Leviticus 19). However, here’s Jesus who has exclaimed to love our enemies. I like to highlight on the questions that

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Charlesworth asks regarding loving our enemies. He challenged the idea of loving our enemies by reminding us of 9/11 and the promise to destroy us from some in Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, Nazi Germany – when Israelis who remember the Holocaust and killing their loved ones with suicide bombs, the Palestinians who believe that their land have been stolen by Israelis to oppress them (p. xvi). All of these events make us think that it is an absurd idea to love our enemies.

In Chapter 1, *The Sources*, Flusser explores about how reliable are the sources we have about Jesus. He says, “The early Christian accounts about Jesus are not as untrustworthy as scholars today often think. The first three Gospels not only present a reasonably faithful picture of Jesus as a Jew of his own time, but they even consistently retain his way of speaking about the Savior in the third person (p. 2).” He also argues that when we read the Synoptic Gospels, we do not find Jesus so much of a redeemer of mankind but a Jewish miracle-worker and a preacher. I agree with Flusser. If we look at Luke 2, we find Jesus at the temple as early as 12-year-old boy among the priests. In Mark, we find Him sharing various parables to teach people about God’s kingdom. We also find all different kinds of miraculous works of Jesus in all three Gospels from feeding the crowd of five thousand to healing many and driving out evil spirits, and raising people from dead. Only in Gospel of John do we find a post-Easter Christology. Therefore, just because we do not find the kerygmatic Jesus in these gospels do not mean that these chapters are not reliable as it was based on the accounts of Jesus’ own time as a Jew.

In Chapter 2, *Ancestry*, the author makes a remarkable point about how the genealogy of Jesus Christ i.e., “Jesus the Messiah,” has to be a descendent of David, according to the ancient Jewish belief. However, Jesus’ ancestry is traced to King David through the genealogy of Joseph and not of Mary but the same chapters, Matthew and Luke also discloses the story of the virgin

birth of Jesus. The acclamation is something of mind-boggling because Jesus' conception was without the agency of a human father, Joseph. This was something that I had never even given a slightest thought about ever prior to reading this book. This only goes to prove the point that Flusser is making that messianic Christians so easily accept Jesus because He is the descendent of King David. Additionally, King David had lots of descendants so, the fact that one is a descendent from the family of David doesn't necessarily legitimize a person for messianic claims (p. 8). Therefore, we cannot be certain that Jesus himself belonged to David's line but due to the people's demand of fulfillment of this condition is made legit in the messianic claim (p. 9).

Chapter 5, *Love*, is one of the main reasons that Flusser's work is unique as he focuses about Jesus' elevated meaning of love as I mentioned above in the introduction. Although in ancient Jewish practice, importance about loving our neighbors but Jesus took it to the next level by asking us love our enemies who are also equally our neighbors too. Here, Jesus was establishing something very revolutionary, and the kind of teaching that no rabbis had ever taught priorly. Jesus also shifts the narrative from Old Testament about doing good and serving our masters for really the sake of reward but He calls for the new morality, and the idea of the kingdom of heaven (p. 55). Flusser mentions that Judaism is a religion of ethics in which the principle of justice is crucial and this is the reason as to the division of mankind into the righteous and the sinners is so vital. However, in modern Judaism, it had been acknowledged that people cannot be either just good or just bad but both the good and evil existed in everyone's heart. Thus, knowing this, it brings us to the acceptance that it is the mercy of God that makes us acceptable in the Holy Father's eyes and therefore, we should be forgiving and merciful to others as well.

There are plenty of notable points that Flusser makes throughout the book however, I cannot accommodate to fit all in this short book review. To say the least, I found this book very insightful and thought-provoking. It helped me to be more open and helped me realize that I must think further than just what the context provides. In my opinion, I do believe that Jesus was not only a Jew but wanted to stay within the faith of the Jewish, and that he personally identifies himself with Jesus' Jewish worldview, both moral and political which could have had the potential to change our world and prevent the greatest part of evil and suffering.

Reference:

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