

Jeanine Gherardi

Professor Garcia

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New Testament~Tuesday 5:30pm

The Sage from Galilee~Book Review

David Flusser's book, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* offers a biographical portrait of Jesus as well as historical insight about Jesus and the Gospels in their Jewish contexts. The book opens with a foreword by R. Steven Notley where he states "During my years of study and work with Flusser, I observed his desire not only to understand the teachings of Jesus, but to see their relevance in difficult circumstances." It was not Flusser's insights into Jesus' teaching that impressed Notley, instead, it was Flusser's belief that studying the words of Jesus should have a positive impact on how Christians should live. Notley pointed out that Professor Flusser's hope was for his book to "serve as a mouthpiece for Jesus' message today.

In his introduction of David Flusser, James H. Charlesworth gives an account of what he believes to be the most important part of Flusser's book is Jesus' concept of love. Charlesworth believes that David Flusser was correct when he emphasized the critical aspect which is that Jesus called us to love our enemies, and that love has the power to impact the world.

Charlesworth gave an anecdote of the conversation between him and Flusser on January 7, 1993, explaining the way Flusser was bothered and a little intrigued by the book of John which gives the account of the woman accused of adultery. The bible states that Jesus said that no one was left standing to condemn her, and replied that he would not condemn her either because the old "halakot" (normative way to behave), demanded two witnesses. Flusser emphasized that Jesus upheld the old Jewish law while He was beginning to develop and define the way to live. The

decisions of Jesus were illustrated in the transition toward normative Jewish Law or way to behave. Charlesworth stated, "As a scholar I was pleased to open the window and see this insight." They concluded mutually that "the woman caught in adultery set up a barrier between canon and other "scriptural" passages, since this section of John is where the so-called apocryphal New Testament appears in the canonical New Testament." They also believed that "this pericope has a very good chance of reflecting a historical event, therefore we should be leery about assuming traditions recorded later (according to extant sources) must be devoid of historical insights."

The main purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life. The first chapter speaks about the only important Christian sources concerning Jesus are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and Flosser's book states the rest of the New Testament tells us almost nothing about his life. Among the four Gospels, John is properly regarded as being more concerned with presenting a theological perspective than the first three Gospels. Due to their parallels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke can be printed in three columns to form a synopsis, which is now commonly called "Synoptic Gospels" . Besides non Christian documents and hindrance to learning about Christ's life is a temptation to try to uncover the psychological background that began Christianity. The most reliable sources for information concerning Jesus's appealing person are his own words and the accounts of his followers. Following the Christian framework, his followers considered him to be the Son of God, but because of the length of his public activity, documents do not reveal exactly what Jesus thought of himself. Although there is no explicit answer to the question of his own self-evaluation, early Christian accounts of Jesus are not as unreliable as scholars often assume. The first three Gospels paint a very accurate picture of Jesus as a Jew of his time, and they even retain his habit

of speaking of the Savior in the third person. The book notes that “an impartial reading of the Synoptic Gospels results in a picture not so much of a redeemer of mankind, but of a Jewish miracle-worker and preacher. There can be little doubt that this picture does not do full justice to the historical Jesus.”.

The chapter speaking on the ancestry of Jesus was extremely interesting and it resonated with me mostly because of the tension that Jesus dealt with in regards to His family. According to Luke 8:21, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.", Jesus showed the importance of those who believe and that they are His family. And again when the woman in the crowd raised her voice saying, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked' to which Jesus replied “But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:27-28). The book also points out the manner in which Mark's gospel portrays Jesus's family dynamics. Mark shows a family that rejects Jesus, quoting Jesus saying "Who are my mother and my brothers? And looking around at those who sat about him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother" (Mark 3:34-35). I definitely feel Flusser gave enough evidence that breaking family ties is sometimes something that happens as a result of being a follower of Christ. Flusser provides several scriptures to show examples of Jesus point, such as “Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:28-30). To another he said, "Follow me?" But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. ..." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said

to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-62). And "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters ... he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The chapter ended by pointing out that Acts 1 explains what happened to Jesus' family after his death, His brother, James, came to believe as a result of a resurrection appearance. Jesus' other brothers were later converted to faith. And regardless of Mary's inability to fully understand her son, she believed in His resurrection.

I believe the book gave an accurate portrayal of Jesus's life and His the Jewish ancestry. The book focused a lot on the impact Jesus's true nature can have on the Christian today. I think the book provides readers with knowledge about Jesus' origins and the circumstances under which he developed his beliefs, and how we should live.