

account should also allay the suspicion among other Catholics about openness to other religious traditions, especially when such suspicion is based on an undiscerning reception of *Dominus Jesus*. Other Catholic thinkers may want to go further than D'Costa, but at least any Catholic should be able to go as far.

Perhaps one question to be posed about the book is whether it is necessary in so short a study to have both parts. Might it not just have been better to allow the Catholic position to stand as established within its own terms and explore it with confidence, without feeling the need to spend so much time on a defensive justification of the Catholic line by refuting pluralist positions? The first part of the book ends up being longer than the second, whereas the second part could have easily been expanded much more and to great benefit for Catholic readers.

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**WHO WAS JESUS? A JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE** edited by Craig Evans and Paul Copan, *Westminster John Knox Press, Harrow, 2001. Pp. 205, £15.99 pbk.*

This book grew out of a public discussion or debate between a Jew (Peter Zaas) and a Christian (William Lane Craig) on the question 'Who Was Jesus?', and contains the original texts of their presentations and discussion along with contributions from a number of invited scholars, both Jewish and Christian.

From the outset there is an interesting difference of perspective. For Craig, as for the title of the book, the question is who Jesus *was*, while Zaas asks who Jesus *is*, which is surely the relevant question for Christians. However, Craig and the other Christian contributors to the subsequent discussion concentrate in the main on the past, bringing evidence for the historicity of the gospels, of the resurrection, of the sayings of Jesus etc. They find it difficult to understand how, in the face of the weight of the evidence they bring, Zaas can simply say that Jews do not think about Jesus, and that the claims made about him by his followers are irrelevant to the religious life of a Jew. It is another Jew (Herbert Bassler) in a chapter entitled 'The Gospel Would Have Been Greek to Jews' who points out that 'events, in and of themselves, have no meaning beyond raw data and cannot be used to prove matters of faith. The Christian appeal to the Christ event cannot expect any privileged hearing except from the already-converted' (p.115). This point is conceded by Donald Hagner, who writes that 'the Gospels were written not as neutral historical documents but as theological documents designed to defend and promote the Christian faith. It is clear that they present *interpreted* history, and it must be admitted that sometimes the degree of interpretation is considerable' (p.48). But Hagner is also convinced that no Christian can answer the question 'Who Is Jesus?' without becoming 'an evangelist!' (p.57). For him, as for others, it is easy to underestimate the enormity for a Jew of the step from who the historical Jesus was to who Jesus is in Christian belief.

The contributors to the book are (justifiably) proud that their dialogue does not stop at rejoicing over things which are held in common, but goes on to honest discussion of what is not agreed. Such conversations have, thankfully, become more common in recent years. But it is a discussion that is more important for Christians than for Jews. For Christians find it necessary to define themselves in terms of the Hebrew tradition, recognising the Jewishness of the historical Jesus, appreciating the biblical imagery and tradition underlying the New Testament — and these elements are well presented by the various Christian writers. Jews, on the other hand, find no such compulsion to include Jesus or Christianity in their own self-understanding. In fact, Zaas rightly complains about attempts to define Jews by what they do not believe, by the fact that they do not accept Jesus, 'Christians in all respects except for the essential belief in the Messiahship of Jesus' (p.16). Bassler is more forthright, and perhaps more typical than Zaas, in saying that he experiences the gospels as being intended 'to instill contempt, an odium, against Judaism' (p.111). He sees no force in the arguments from history. He writes that the Jesus of history who lived in the first century may have been a Jew who considered himself, or was proclaimed by others, to be the Jewish Messiah who would free them from Roman oppression. 'The Christ of faith is another figure entirely' (p.122). He then throws into relief where the centre of Jewish-Christian dialogue must be. It is not a matter of arguing from a shared source to an agreed understanding. It must begin from the acceptance that at the heart of Christian faith is another figure, another revelation, a *New* covenant. While Bassler's contribution may seem at first sight to be the most negative in the collection, it challenges Christians to face and value the distinctiveness of their faith. Perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book is that of Jacob Neusner, 'At What Point Do Judaisms and Christianities Meet?'. His simple answer, in line with Bassler, is nowhere! But even if one does not agree with his conclusion, his argument is extremely valuable. 'The sequential facts of history — first came this, then that, and finally, the other thing — do not explain the realities of faith' (p.128). These realities, he argues, are mediated to the faithful of Judaism primarily through liturgy. He presents a series of examples of the way in which the Torah, written and oral, is brought to life in the present experience of the practising Jew through the liturgical celebration of festivals and events of the life cycle. The mode of thought which is rooted in Torah, 'shapes the liturgy, imposing in concrete and personal form the pattern of an ever-present past upon the present and turning present-tense time into a paradigm of what will be' (p.142). In Christian terms this might be referred to as a sense of the sacramental - as fruitful a medium as the historical for exploring the question of who Jesus is.

An attempt to discuss who Jesus was in the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue is bound to raise more questions than it answers. In that, this volume has been successful. It is hoped that it will draw many others into the same discussion.

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