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Review: 'Jesus in Focus: A Life in Its Setting'

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knowledge of history and of the perspective on historical research that can come with more profound theological insight.

Though his review of Christian ministry's historical evolution is necessarily brief and skeletal, it manages to convey a sense of the major changes that have characterized ministry over the centuries. His description of the rather rapid shift from early Christianity's more pluralistic and less structured exercise of ministries to the concentration and control of ministry in the episcopacy of the patristic period may be familiar to many readers—any number of studies during the past few years have detailed this development. Less commonly recognized is the reorientation of ministry that came with medieval monasticism; O'Meara draws from the important research of scholars like Congar to provide an enlightening view of this medieval situation. But perhaps the most valuable portion of O'Meara's historical sketch deals with the ministerial forms and attitudes of the modern period. This provides a solid grounding for his perception and appraisal of present-day ministerial ferment and for his suggestions about desirable future developments.

In many respects, O'Meara's explanation of Christian ministry provides a counterpoise to Tavard's position. Like Schillebeeckx—for that matter like most European writers on ministry—O'Meara sees community leadership as the basic ministry from which other functions, particularly Eucharistic celebration, derive. Tavard several times adverts to this position, only to dismiss it as fundamentally misleading; he opts instead for an ordination empowerment directed specifically to Eucharistic celebration. Part of the difficulty in deciding between the two comes from ambiguity in the meaning of "leadership": as such, leadership is not a specific function, but many (including O'Meara) seem to identify it with *official* leadership, i.e., with the function of governing.

This could lead to a strongly clerical view of ministry; such does not occur in O'Meara's treatment. He is quite aware of the pluralism of ministries that has surfaced in recent decades, and he sees such a broadening of ministry beyond ordained clergy as desirable, even necessary, in the contemporary Church. At the same time he insists, and rightly, that in the case of some ministries a public community approbation and empowerment through one or other ritual of ordination has an enduring role to play as source of ministerial effectiveness.

While one could disagree with specifics of O'Meara's historical analysis or argue that his distinguishing Christianity from "religion" needs to be more nuanced, the book is well-written, stimulating, and quite balanced in its approach. For an overall theological view of what Christian ministry has been and is, I know of no better book.

College of the Holy Cross

BERNARD COOKE

Jesus in Focus: A Life in Its Setting. By Gerard S. Sloyan. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983. 212 pages. \$7.95 (paper).

In this charming, readable volume Gerard Sloyan makes another memorable contribution toward understanding Jesus in historical context. Reading the early chapters in the book can easily give the impression that one is listening at fireside as Sloyan spins folksy stories from his encyclopedic knowledge of the Scriptures, of the people of Jesus' time, and of the land of Palestine then and now.

The value of the book, however, only begins there. Continually the author prods us subtly and gently, but ever so poignantly, toward a critique of our inadequate understanding of the true significance of Jesus and of the meaning of authentic Christianity.

The author states his purpose on page 3. He wishes "to go in search of the heart of this Jewish *hasid*, this saint and son of God the churches revere." The book, he continues, "is interested in the way five different communities of Christians (including the Pauline) believed in him toward the end of the first century."

The first two chapters, "The Story and Its Tellers" and "The Land and Its People" provide an important setting for perceiving Jesus in focus. Sloyan clarifies what a gospel is and what it is not, and highlights briefly the uniqueness of each evangelist's presentation. Then he proceeds to create with graphic strokes the environs of early first century Palestine that constituted the world in which Jesus lived.

The author then probes several aspects of Jesus' identity: wise man, saint who heals, mystic, teacher, proclaimer of an age to come. Each term or title is studied in historical context, and the unique way in which the title applies to Jesus is underscored.

Sloyan brings out the richness of the personality of Jesus. At some length he portrays Jesus as a storyteller and a truth-teller. Some of the special qualities of Jesus are then probed: his compassion for fellow humans, his absolute trust in God, his sharing of meals with anyone who would eat with him, and his respect for women as equals.

In the final part of the book, Sloyan treats of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the development of a theological understanding of Christ as developed in the New Testament and in the early Councils of the church. The last chapter presents an interesting summary of the understanding of Jesus in the Qur'an.

Sloyan crisply describes the uniqueness of Christ. "There was a man . . . to whom the infinite God was more intensely present than to any other. . . . To know him is to know God in him. . . . This true man is 'true God' . . . because the Father has begotten him from his own being as his only son. An eternal word was spoken to him in time, a word of God that is no less than God himself" (pp. 177f.).

This book can be a helpful companion to a course on the New Testament or on Jesus. It will also be of great value to the wider audience of adult Christians who are in search of a more mature understanding of the significance of Jesus for human life.

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WILLIAM P. ROBERTS

The Catholic Sacraments. By Joseph Martos. *Message of the Sacraments*, 1. 1983. 227 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$7.95).

Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation. By Thomas A. Marsh. *Message of the Sacraments*, 2. 1984. 205 pages. \$12.95 (paper \$7.95).

Blessed and Broken: An Exploration of the Contemporary Experience of God in Eucharistic Celebration. By Ralph A. Keifer. *Message of the Sacraments*, 3. 1982. viii + 148 pages. \$9.95 (paper \$6.95).



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