

REVIEW ESSAYS

The "Real Jesus" in Debate

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A primary objective of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* is to foster biblical scholarship that respects biblical literature as Scripture and willingly engages, rather than resists, its religious dimension. Professor Luke Timothy Johnson's recently published *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) is a book that speaks directly to issues with which the Institute for Biblical Research and the *Bulletin* are very much concerned. Interest in Johnson's book was keen from the start, with the 500 advanced copies available at HarperCollins's display table sold out by the second day of the 1995 SBL meeting in Philadelphia. (I was one of the disappointed ones who had to wait until the following January to receive his copy.) Sales continue to be strong, and the issues raised by this book continue to be discussed.

In one of its sessions during the 1996 SBL meeting in New Orleans the Historical Jesus Section held a panel discussion of *The Real Jesus*. The reviewers were Adela Yarbro Collins and Walter Wink. The latter is a member of the much publicized—and much maligned—Jesus Seminar. Professor Collins is the author of *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) and is currently writing the Hermeneia commentary on the Gospel of Mark. She has many other publications, including important studies in Christian apocalyptic. Professor Wink's *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) has become a standard in Gospel research. Wink's interests in the personal relevance of Scripture is amply attested in such books as *The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), and *Transforming Biblical Study* (2 vols., Nashville: Abingdon, 1990). Wink's review is delightfully humorous, as well as insightful, and should go a long way toward dispelling the canard that biblical scholarship is dull.

Following the reviews by Collins and Wink, Professor Johnson responds. Johnson is the author of numerous works, including commentaries such as *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991) and *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Knox Preaching Guides; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987). His books *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 9; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) and *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) attest to Johnson's commitment to Christian faith and to the relevance and value of Scripture.

As editor of the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* I take great pleasure in presenting these reviews and response. In my judgment the various issues touched upon and the approaches the participants have taken in grappling with them expose important aspects of the assumptions, presuppositions, philosophies, and methods underlying biblical research in general and historical Jesus research in particular. It is hoped that the *Bulletin's* readership will find these essays stimulating and thought provoking.