

and so forth. One of the more recent publications of the former bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright, is his massive study of the Gospels, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; it's a vastly more rich, subtle and detailed study than Locke's. Wright is by no means a liberal. That makes it especially fascinating to note that, on his interpretation, the basic category the Gospel writers used for coming to grips with this baffling man, Jesus of Nazareth, was that he was the long-expected Messiah.

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Tobias Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of His Prophetic Mission*, SNTS Monograph Series (New York: CUP, 2011), pp. xvii+304. \$99.00 (hbk).

This monograph is a revised version of Hägerland's doctoral dissertation, written at the University of Gothenberg (Sweden) in 2009 under the supervision of Samuel Byrskog. The work opens by asking a clear, simple question: Did the historical Jesus forgive sins? Several New Testament passages relate to this question, such as Luke 7:47–9, but singular attention is given to Mark 2:1–12 (Matt 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26), where Jesus forgives the sins of a paralysed man and declares that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. The standard criteria of historical Jesus research are employed to determine whether this episode is historical, but a hierarchy of criteria privileges those which are most reliable. By applying the criterion of 'discontinuity' in chapter 3, Hägerland argues that the understanding of forgiveness in the Gospel tradition is qualitatively different from what appears in later Christianity, and is thus probably historical. Chapter 4 applies the criterion of 'implausibility' and argues that the conflict in 2:6–10 (where Jesus is called a blasphemer for forgiving sins) is historically implausible, since the claim to forgive sins would have been heard as a prophetic statement common to prophetic figures in first-century Palestine, and not an act of blasphemy. Chapter 5 then applies the criteria of coherence and incoherence in order to place the act of forgiveness within a plausible portrait of the historical Jesus. Hägerland understands the forgiveness of sin as a feature of Jesus' prophetic work. With the historical core of Mark 2 clarified, the next concern is to explain the process by which later accretions (such as 2:6–10) became attached to the factually historical elements (such as 2:5). To explain the history of development, Hägerland relies on explanations from rhetorical textbooks about the relationship between the *chreia* and

the *apomnemeuma*. Where the *chreia* is defined as a simple and concise statement or deed, the *apomnemeuma* expands and develops this simple form in various ways. Chapter 6 explains how the most basic form of Mark 2 was developed according to this rhetorical model, from a simple event in the life of the historical Jesus to the narrative of the Gospel of Mark.

The book is a model of careful scholarship, and Hägerland everywhere recognises the potential pitfalls which accompany any effort to attain precision in historical Jesus research. And yet, at least one unresolved point of tension persists regarding the category of ‘prophet’. Jesus is very precisely identified as a ‘leadership popular prophet’, a label which distinguishes him from other types of contemporary prophets (pp. 202–25). But no other ‘leadership popular prophets’ in the first century forgave sins (p. 206). If forgiving sins is a critical quality of Jesus’ prophetic ministry, how much has Jesus really been given a plausible place in first-century Palestine? Hägerland recognises this problem, and tries to resolve it by meticulously arguing (pp. 142–67) that ‘the literature of the period displays an increased tendency to portray Old Testament prophets as commissioned to “forgive sins”’ (p. 214). But such an argument still does not connect Jesus to living people active in the first century. If only biblical figures can forgive sins, the charge of blasphemy against Jesus may not be so finally explained away as unhistorical. To be sure, the charge of blasphemy is difficult to understand, but the evidence here does not show that Jesus’ activity was completely unproblematic in the first century. Even so, such tensions are common in historical Jesus scholarship, and this clear and careful book endeavours always to balance responsibly the character of our evidence with the desire to say as much as possible about the first-century context of Jesus.

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Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringer, ed. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law and Christopher Rowland (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books/Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp. 322, \$35.00/£22.00.

This festschrift, presented to Professor Tim Gorringer of the University of Exeter on his retirement, fittingly reflects and celebrates his own concerns and passions: namely, the theological exploration of a range of topics not always considered ‘theological’, including education, art, politics, ecology, economics, criminal justice and urban planning. Gorringer has spent an