

Instead, he focuses upon the *pre-Easter Jesus* (again, his preferred term to the more common "historical Jesus") as providing a model for the interpretation and understanding of this experience. Here, the pre-Easter Jesus gives dogmatic shape to Christian faith based upon Jesus as a "spirit person," someone with, as Schleiermacher described it, a pervasive "God consciousness" that can exemplify such experiences to us. By taking us within this new reality, Jesus created a paradigmatic relationship with the world which Christians are to adopt.

There are problems with both of these works. Crossan's *Jesus*, while easier to read than his *The Historical Jesus*, concomitantly lacks the detailed arguments of the later book. Given its intended audience of general readers, this might mislead them as to the nature and the reliability of Crossan's historical research. Borg's book is equally lacking in detailed arguments in support of his historical conclusions. While one cannot criticize him for this, in that that is not the intention of the book itself, one can critique his misstatements regarding the Jesus Seminar (of which both he and Crossan were prominent members). Specifically, Borg misstates the circumstances and the findings of the Jesus Seminar as reflecting a "consensus" among biblical scholars, whereas in fact, the seminar's findings reflect the majority position (taken by vote) among a self-selected, limited group of biblical scholars both from within and without the academy. This distinction is particularly important where, as is the case with Borg, the book is intended for the general populace.

On the positive side, both of these books present strong images of Jesus in the context of faith. That is to say, both provide a historically plausible portrait of the *pre-Easter Jesus* and a context within which that portrait may be incorporated within an individual's understanding of the Christian faith.

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Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam. By Talal Asad. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. ISBN 0-8018-4631-5. Pp. 335.

Genealogies of Religion may prove to be an important book for theological discussion even though, strictly speaking, it is anthropology. Talal Asad has offered a critical and much needed discussion on the development of religious practices within the setting of culturally specific norms and relationships of power. He does this by concentrating, in a section entitled "Archaisms," on practices of pain, discipline, and truth in medieval monasticism. The specificity of his examples has the consequence of offering the reader a well-argued and precise exposition of religious "truth" fabricated within social practices of power. It is a perspective that cannot be allowed to escape the imagination of religious thinkers. Though it will be interesting to see the reaction of Islamic scholars, this review will confine its comments to the Christian side.

Asad is first critical of Clifford Geertz's well known article, "Religion as a

Cultural System" (1966). Guiding his reader through Geertz's use of the techniques of structuralism to describe religion, Asad critiques the supposed universal definition of religious symbols. What Asad wants to reveal is that Geertz's mistaken approach is typical of the atmosphere of Western metaphysics. Geertz separates the symbols of religion from the customs of religion, a move that assigns an essential function to symbols despite concrete variations in ritualistic settings. This separation allows one the luxury of defining a "symbol" on a purely practical basis outside of the daily fretting of social interaction. According to Asad, whose analysis is nowhere lacking precision, this is not possible. A symbol cannot be defined from such a distant and seemingly pompous vantage point; a symbol not only arises out of the daily fret of the shorn and tangled fibers of social activity, it also "functions" only so far as this matrix reproduces the relationships that sustain the symbol's operation. The desired independence of the function of symbols in Geertz's structuralism is contradicted by the genealogical conclusion of Asad's remarks: "Religious symbols—whether one thinks of them in terms of communication or cognition, or guiding action or of expressing emotion—cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial" (53).

From this point of departure, Asad travels imaginatively through the world of medieval Christianity, introducing the reader to a kind of discussion uncommon in theology. Instead of defining a vague and general notion of the concept of the "soul" in monasticism, for example, Asad is interested in defining disciplinary practices that created the social space for the comprehension of the soul as a locus of training and self-reforming discipline. Where traditional Church histories see the monastic movement as an escape from medieval society and, at best, a location for fostering the burgeoning of scholastic philosophy, Asad presents the movement steadfastly attached to the world and interested, on the contrary, in shaping its ideals into religious desires.

Finally, and realistically, "desire" emerges into the discussion as a positive social force and as a key in the production and rationalization of religious practices. Fortunately, simplistic disjunctions such as that between church and society, upon which so much theological training rests, disappear. Readers are invited to contemplate religious desires as techniques produced in the secular setting, though refined technically by the church—an analysis of religion that perhaps can change the nature of theological investigation.

It is unfortunate that such an inquiry should come from anthropology. Aside from remaining distant for most theologians, the discussion remains too short and the implications for religious studies are not pursued. Moreover, the theological enterprise is likely to overlook the courage and frankness of Asad's position. *Genealogies of Religion* is a book that deserves a wide readership. Among religionists it can serve as a primer for both historical and philosophical re-evaluation.