

RBL 06/2011



**Hoffman, Paul**

***Jesus von Nazaret und Die Kirche: Spurensicherung im Neuen Testament***

Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009. Pp. 206.  
Hardcover. €18.90. ISBN 9783460300231.

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Paul Hoffmann, professor emeritus at the University of Bamberg (Germany), is widely known as one of the founders and leaders of the International Q Project. When coming across this collection of essays from his pen, one would expect studies on the reconstruction of Q, just like an earlier collection: *Tradition und Situation: Studien zur Jesusüberlieferung in der Logienquelle und den synoptischen Evangelien* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen NS 28; Münster: Aschendorff, 1995). This volume, however, is different. It comprises twelve short essays that have been written over a range of thirty years (1978–2008) that document a different aspect of Hoffmann’s work. Here he appears not so much as the meticulous Q scholar but rather as the concerned exegete, theologian, and, not last, Roman Catholic priest who wants the outcome of his research to be fruitful for the church. Thus, most of the essays collected in this volume were originally published in journals or collections for a nonspecialist readership, and many of them are based on lectures.

The introduction (10–12) gives some hints on methodology that explain the word “Spurensicherung” in the subtitle, meaning the gathering of evidence in a criminal investigation. An exegete in search of traces of the historical Jesus in the New Testament has to work like a detective on the “crime scene” of early Christianity. However, the

following essays are not centered on the sifting of evidence and discussions of criteria, as one would expect from studies on the historical Jesus.

The essays are grouped into three main parts: The first main part (“Jesus, der prophetische Bote der Gottesherrschaft,” 13–72) deals with the central issues in the proclamation of Jesus: it is basically about transgressing or, rather, transcending boundaries with the aim of creating an integrating and inclusive community (esp. 14–24, also 25–38). The driving force behind this movement is Jesus’ “simple faith” (“Der ‘einfache Glaube’ des Jesus von Nazaret,” 39–52)—the experience of God as “Abba” that made Jesus share human life (to the point that he was blamed for being “a glutton and a drunkard”). Jesus’ simple faith is thus faith that is closely connected with human life in all its dimensions. This faith, however, calls for practical application. Hoffmann finds this clearly pronounced in the Sermon on the Mount. His reading of it is focused on an ethics of peace, culminating in the command of love of enemies (it is worth noting that the nonviolence demanded in the Sermon on the Mount is not passive endurance but active overcoming of evil). This essay (“Bergpredigt und christliche Verantwortung für den Frieden,” 53–62) was first published in 1984 and is thus a document of theological reflection that went along with the German peace movement of the early 1980s. The last essay in this part (“Die Überwindung der Herrschaft von Menschen über Menschen,” 63–72) applies Jesus’ ethics *ad intra*, as it were: Christian community must not be characterized by the rule of humans over other humans; as Hoffmann shows, this egalitarian ethos has been lost already in the New Testament, on the way from Jesus to the Pastoral Epistles.

The second main part (“Der Bote wird zur Botschaft,” 73–122) moves one step forward. What is at stake here is not so much the historical Jesus but rather the many ways of thinking about Jesus. Of particular relevance is the first essay in this part (“Die Pluralität der Jesus-Deutungen im Neuen Testament,” 74–95), which outlines this diversity within and already before the New Testament: Jesus could be thought of as the crucified Messiah (pre-Pauline formulas), as the preexistent Son of God (Antiochene/Pauline traditions), as the Logos incarnate (John), as the crucified Son of God and suffering Son of Man (Mark), or as the divinely begotten Son of the virgin Mary (Matthew and Luke). However, Hoffmann gives special prominence to Q, which does not so much pronounce a “myth” about Jesus but can be seen as the continuation of Jesus’ proclamation of the liberating rule of God. The next essay (96–106) proceeds towards a “concrete Christology” that is at the same time soteriology. In Pauline terms, Jesus’ resurrection is the victory over oppressive powers that can be comprised under the term “sin” (in the singular). This abstraction, however, is not meant to be a sort of demythologization; in order to overcome these powers, one must take them seriously and engage them. This idea is spelled out again in Hoffmann’s reading of Romans (“Gottes Gerechtigkeit und die Moral

des Menschen im Römerbrief,” 107–22). In this reading, Paul spells out what Jesus was all about; Rom 1–8 is thus a treatise about the liberation from oppressive powers, liberation that both Jews and Gentiles are in need of.

The third main part (123–78) contains spotlights from the New Testament for contemporary ecclesiology. The longest among them (“Die Pluralität der Gemeindeformen im Neuen Testament,” 124–43) surveys the diversity of early Christian organizations, beginning with Jesus’ circle of disciples. Instances of the development are the (Jewish-Christian) Matthean community and Paul’s (Gentile-Christian) communities. Hoffmann mentions the Pastoral Epistles as documents of patriarchal forms of leadership in the late first century (“Spätzeit des Neuen Testaments”). The essay closes with considerations on ministry in the New Testament, with special regard to the concept and the expression of “priesthood.” Later conceptions of sacerdotal ministry cannot be traced back to the New Testament. The next two essays are about two protagonists of the New Testament who are also of great significance in today’s ecumenical dialogue: Paul the defiant witness (144–50) stands for plurality within Christianity as an open system that allows for different solutions of pressing questions. Paul’s voice was one among many authentic ones. The essay on Peter (151–67) is mainly an exegesis of Matt 16:17–19, not as words of the historical Jesus to the historical Peter but as part of Matthew’s Gospel (on the redactional level). Here the Matthean Peter is the paradigmatic leader whose “job description” has been given in Matt 13:52: a scribe who has become a *disciple* of the kingdom, that is, a member of the community. The last chapter offers “Perspektiven für eine Kirche der Zukunft” (168–78): fourteen theses that envision the church as an egalitarian and pluralistic body faithful to its foundations in the New Testament.

The appendix comes with notes (180–203), a list of the original publications (204–5), and a list of other publications by Hoffmann on the subject (205–6).

On the whole, Hoffmann’s collected essays for a broader readership give voice to a clear and consistent point of view and offer valuable impulses for the church. Looking back to the origins is sometimes a sting in the flesh of Christianity, but a sting that can set the whole body into motion.