

BOOK REVIEW

Martin Hengel, *Jesus und die Evangelien: Kleine Schriften V* (WUNT, 211; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). vii + 734 pp. Hbk. US\$295.00.

The *Kleine Schriften* (*Short Writings*) series is a collection of Hengel's work on the Gospels spanning the course of his career. This particular volume contains 26 essays arranged chronologically from 1959 to 2004. His goal was to wrestle with difficult texts within the Gospels using a scientific method in order to shed more light on the historical Jesus. This historical venture, while aiming to clarify the truth of the gospel, confesses that such truth cannot and must not be separated from the theological life of the scholar. Thus, the chronological order of this volume also reflects the chronological struggles of Hengel himself in discerning the nature and claims of the Gospels. For the purpose of this review, I will focus on four essays: 'Die Heilungen Jesu und medizinisches Denken'; 'Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen'; 'War Jesus Revolutionär?'; and 'Probleme des Markusevangeliums'.

Concerning Hengel's first chapter, 'Die Heilungen Jesu', Hengel draws various conclusions about the practice of medicine in first-century Palestine. He points out that Jesus' audience may have seen the healings as more substantial than medical intervention due to a general lack of respect for physicians. Not only did purity laws restrict the Jews from performing autopsies or certain medical procedures, but most ailments were seen to be a result of demonic activity within a person or a specific sin of which a person was guilty. In addition to this, first-century Jews would have been quite familiar with how physicians were rendered in Jewish literature. Hengel notes two examples from the Old Testament that may shed light on a negative attitude towards doctors. First, Chronicles tells us that King Asa was unable to receive any type of treatment from the doctors for his disabled feet. Secondly, the book of Job denotes physicians as being thought of as the inventors of lies (Job 13.4). In both cases it seems that to rely on human efforts rather than on God does not result in a positive outcome. This belief, according to Hengel, is best encapsulated in this Jewish prayer: 'The Bleeding

one says: “May it be thy will, O Lord my God, that I serve this action for recovery, and heal me; because you, O God, are the true physician, and your healing is a true one” (p. 3).

Hengel draws from the Gospel of Luke, written by a physician, and suggests that Jesus’ healings are portrayed in a sense that counteracts the common negative attitude towards physicians. In other words, Jesus not only physically healed a sick person, but also allowed that person to be healed by faith. This rather large distinction between Jesus and other contemporary physicians probably also highlights Jesus’ ability to forgive sins as well.

Hengel’s second article, ‘Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen’, highlights the importance of Jesus’ message to his female followers. Hengel notes that the testimony of the women in the Gospel story must have played an important part in the early church. Given that the women were mentioned at integral parts of the Gospel story (at the cross, at the burial and at the empty tomb), the women were probably ranked within the early church, with Mary Magdalene first since she was one of the first to witness the resurrected appearance of Jesus.

This study is important because it draws attention to and validates the integral eye-witness accounts provided by the women of the early church. It is also important because it provides a strong case of validation for the Gospel story. The fact that Jesus made his first post-resurrection appearance to a woman would have struck a dissonant chord amongst Jewish readers. If this is true, why would a Gospel writer appeal to the testimony of a woman when a Jewish audience would have rejected such a testimony? It may be, as Hengel suggests, that Mary Magdalene’s testimony was not received until it was verified by Peter (Mk 16.10).

In his eighth article, ‘War Jesus Revolutionär?’, Hengel discusses the possibility that Jesus should be compared with Jewish revolutionaries of his time. Since Jesus, as an itinerant preacher and charismatic healer, did not take up military action, he cannot be compared with the Zealots, much less the infamous revolutionary doctor Che Guevara. Hengel points to Jesus’ sending of the 72 in Lk. 10.4 and notes that his commands do not resemble those of a military commander: the 72 are told not to equip themselves with money, knapsacks and sandals, but they are not told to sell these things for a sword if they should lack one. However, Hengel contrasts this saying with Mt. 10.34 that states that Jesus did not come to earth to bring peace but a sword. Hengel draws

on the work of A. Schlatter and suggests that Jesus was not commanding his church to use the same type of sword that their persecutors used against them; the messianic Kingdom had little in common with the Zealots, since Jesus did not utilize violence in any way. Instead, Jesus promotes a relaxed serenity—something much more radical to human conventions than any subversive tactic used by Zealots. It seems that Jesus provided another way by means of love, which was much more revolutionary. In addition to this, Hengel notes that Jesus' almost passive-aggressive tactics shook Judaism to its core, challenging clerical Jews to love even the Samaritan.

In his eighteenth article, 'Probleme des Markusevangeliums', Hengel begins by noting that no other Gospel has generated more controversy in recent years than Mark. Noting the work of Rudolf Pesch, who defines Mark as a 'conservative redactor', Hengel asserts that Mark processed the traditions of many literary sources, prompting his theological design. The prominent question for Hengel is whether Mark was a formative theologian or merely a collector of previously asserted traditions. While both may be true, Hengel does not see Mark's Gospel as a series of stories haphazardly placed together. Instead, the evangelist shows careful consideration while planning his narrative. This was also noted by Jülicher, who suggested that 'the arrangement of the whole [Gospel] is well thought out and effective' (p. 435).

Concerning the narrative formation of Mark, a number of scholars have contributed a variety of theories attempting to explain how and why Mark fashioned his Gospel in the manner that he did. Hengel suggests that Mark may most resemble an ancient biography, but that his listeners may not have understood it as such. Instead, the Gospels were thought of as a unique type of biographical genre: 'daß die Evangelien eine literarische Gattung von ganz neuer und besonderer Art seien' (p. 433). Mark is not necessarily connected chronologically—especially after Mk 11.1—as one might expect in a biography, but the short anecdotal scenes found in the latter half of the Gospel do resemble other ancient Jewish and Hellenistic biographical genres.

There are some scholars who suggest that Mark may have been written in the form of a dramatic narrative (*dramatischen Erzählung*) containing several 'acts'. Such work takes into consideration Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is an analysis of the various elements of Greek tragedy. Of particular interest to Hengel is the work of F.G. Lang, who separates Mark into five acts (*Akten*). Each of these acts contains various ele-

ments of drama, some of which can be found in Aristotle: recognition (10.46-52), reversal (11.1–13.37), *pathos* (14.1) and fear (16.8), to name only a few. However, Hengel ultimately rejects the connection between Mark and Tragedy on the basis that they emphasize different things. While Tragedy is primarily concerned with living despite guilt and the effects of fate (*pathos*), Mark emphasizes the presence of salvation amidst suffering and death.

In light of the essays presented in this volume, I want to praise Hengel for his clear and concise writing style. His logic is straightforward and easy to follow—especially for a non-native German reader—which enables him to present his ideas in a simple manner. That being said, I find that Hengel does at times presuppose certain principles. For example, when considering the importance of Mary Magdalene's testimony for the early church, Hengel is quite correct in suggesting that her words are of central importance to the resurrection account, but is this enough to suggest a hierarchy of sorts among the women? I think that Hengel may overstate his case by making this suggestion, as he only provides one criterion. I found myself wanting to read more about this assertion.

Another example can be found in Hengel's discussion of the negative Jewish attitude towards physicians. Though his examples from the Old Testament are well taken, they are somewhat obscure. Are they enough to suggest a common negative attitude towards physicians? Would the introduction of Hellenistic medicine have nullified the theological presuppositions underlying illness, namely that illness was caused by demonic powers or judgment from God? Such questions may well have an answer, but Hengel does not go into great depth as to their explanation.

Hengel's reason for rejecting the tragic elements of Mark may also be suspect. His primary reason for rejecting this claim is that Mark emphasizes salvation amidst suffering and death, but where is salvation in Mark? If one is to accept the shorter ending of Mark (at 16.8), then the reader is left with no apparent resolution to the fear that the women exhibit at the tomb; this is not necessarily an ending that dictates salvation in the way that Hengel describes. However, if we are to consider Aristotle's three narrative categories in light of Mark—suffering, recognition and reversal—we find that Mark's ending may reflect a type of reversal and possible recognition amidst suffering. In this way, Aristotle's model may work very well.

As mentioned above, Hengel's writing is very clear and provides a perspective on the Gospels that is quite profound. However, I suspect that Hengel reveals some of his theological presuppositions that guide his writing. While this may be appropriate and impossible to avoid at times, it may also lead to biased assessment. This being said, I recommend this book for anyone pursuing Gospel studies. As Hengel notes, the chronological order of these works reflects his own growth as a theological thinker and exegete. This kind of honesty allows one to track his growth as a thinker throughout his prestigious career.

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