Butler University
Digital Commons @ Butler University

Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS | College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2009

Review of The Burial of Jesus: History and Faith, by James F. McGrath

Brent A. R. Hege
Butler University, bhege@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers

Part of the History of Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
Review of The Burial of Jesus: History and Faith, by James F. McGrath. Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 63, no. 4 (October 2009): 426.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact fgaede@butler.edu.

serve as concise, clear, and helpful introductions to each theologian. They also illustrate both the continuities and divergences that have characterized the church's interpretations of Christ, of his life and ministry, and of their significance for the redemption of humanity and the whole creation.

While Brondos strives to be objective and seeks to avoid prescriptive or apologetic inclinations, his evaluative comments at the end of each chapter betray particular theological priorities. This reality does not significantly skew his presentations. However, the brevity of each chapter does not allow for in-depth description or nuanced analysis. Brondos' choice of theologians is understandable, but voices from the northern hemisphere and from the Western tradition predominate, an obvious limitation of this survey. It should also be noted that Brondos' focus is on academic theology. He does not explore the story of salvation as it is reflected in the confessional and creedal heritage of the church catholic and as it is proclaimed in the pulpits of worshiping communities. He also does not venture to evaluate the implications of academic theology for the faith journeys of believers. Indeed, perhaps because of his commitment to objective description and analysis, Brondos offers no constructive proposals for the church's contemporary proclamation of the story of salvation. University students and seminarians are the most obvious audience of this volume.

KURT K. HENDEL
LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CHICAGO
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The Burial of Jesus: History and Faith

by James F. McGrath

BookSurge Publishing, Charleston, 2008. 142 pp. $12.99.
ISBN 978-1439210178.

THE RECENT CONTROVERSY surrounding the discovery in Talpiot of an empty ossuary containing the name "Jesus, Son of Joseph" once again thrust the issue of faith and history into the international spotlight. Every Easter and Christmas, national news magazines feature cover stories asking about the "real" Jesus. The excitement and controversy aroused by these semi-annual questions masks the more important question that often remains unasked in our congregations: what is the relationship between Christian faith and historical research?

In *The Burial of Jesus*, NT scholar James McGrath poses this very question as one of decisive interest and significance for contemporary Christian faith. Using the news of the Talpiot ossuary as an entrée to more substantive discussions of the relationship between Christian faith and historical investigation, McGrath invites his audience into the world of NT research by addressing the often overlooked episode of the burial of Jesus as a key to understanding both the relationship between faith and history and the essence of Christian faith as Easter faith.

Writing for a lay audience, McGrath takes up such topics as the principles of historical research, basic strategies of interpretation currently employed by biblical scholars, and general theological claims that form the foundation of the Christian faith. McGrath's intention in this study is "to suggest ways in which the fruits of historical study can be integrated into Christian faith and theology" (p. 10). To accomplish this objective, he offers accessible definitions and examples of scientific historical research, textual criticism, and theological claims concerning the resurrection. McGrath does a particularly admirable job of distinguishing faith's and history's proper spheres while making the case for a confident faith that takes the claims of historical and scientific research seriously rather than as a threat to faith.

The Burial of Jesus is a valuable contribution to a growing body of scholarly literature intended for a lay audience, inviting laypersons into the exciting world of biblical scholarship and equipping them with some basic tools for making sense of the rich complexity of the NT witness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This text will serve congregations well as a guide for detailed Bible studies, particularly during Lent and Holy Week, challenging Christians to integrate historical understanding into the faith that confesses Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord.

BRENT A. R. HEGE
BUTLER UNIVERSITY
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA