



ÅBO AKADEMI JOURNAL FOR
HISTORICAL JESUS RESEARCH

Foreword for Finnish and Foreign Readers

Tom Holmén
tholmen@abo.fi

While the early 1980s “renaissance” of the quest for the historical Jesus research is moving into the past, the chaotic creativity it set in motion is gradually calming down. This is not to say that much would not still be going on. There is still lots of activity in the field, creativity, insight and effort. Even new journals focusing on the branch of research are being established. Also, a new generation of questers is coming of age who are in a better position to return a verdict on this latest phase of Jesus research.

In fact, today, the academic study of the historical Jesus can be commended. The study makes progress and accumulates learning. To observe this we may simply look back. Present scholars cannot carry out research as it was done in the 19th century, in the beginning of the 20th century or even as late as around the middle of the 20th century. Some would draw the line even closer. On the other hand, all previous phases still in many ways contribute to today’s scholarship, and not only by showing what one should not do. There is no sign as to suggest that the future of today would be somehow remarkably different.

The academic study of the historical Jesus is also a highly relevant branch of research. We only need to think of the huge void in humankind’s perception of its past that would exist without historical knowledge about Jesus: this study is about a human being whose impact on the world has been greater, wider, deeper and longer lasting than anybody else’s before or after him. To be considered here are also the challenges of the study which are on a par with its *raison d’être*: this is not an easy task but, on the contrary, one extremely difficult to handle. Many intricate problems of methodology are involved as well as many intricate and delicate questions of worldview. What the study does and how it performs brought into relation with these determinants shows its true color.

Further, the academic study of the historical Jesus fulfills an important societal task. Discourse about religions is growing in importance in western societies, multiculturalism underlining their presence in an unprecedented way. At the same time, however, the discourse is getting increasingly problematic, for the common basic knowledge about Christianity, let alone of other religions, is shrinking. There are also new players on the field contributing to the discourse, trendy new beliefs and social media truths that effectively shape the general understanding of the world. Research cannot dictate how to think about Jesus but it can provide the discourse with information and comments otherwise unobtainable.

Yet, the academic study of the historical Jesus today is probably on the verge of moving on to a new phase. New centers of interest are being emphasized while

some older ones are losing gravity. Debates tend to revolve around questions different from those of the last thirty or so years. Perhaps the aforesaid continuing, yet calmer (and more controlled?) creativity will also play a part in this. Maybe the change can take place in a different way this time. Maybe the next quest will not require a cessation of research, even momentary or partial, from which to take its leap forward. For such cessations have sometimes meant the loss of many treasureable lessons of the past, and not only those showing what one should do. We will need to wait and see, but naturally we can also do something about it.

IESUS ABOENSIS has emerged as a forum of the increasing number of Åbo Akademi University scholars specializing in historical Jesus research. Indeed, a small university and department can rarely be expected to reach the critical mass of scholars making possible enterprises like this. Our trust also lies in the future. For a new generation starting their doctoral programs, the journal offers a most convenient way to engage in discussion with more established scholars.

However, IESUS ABOENSIS is a forum not only for Åbo Akademi researchers. It is not exclusively Finnish, either. We publish the journal simultaneously in English and Finnish because, of course, internationality is an integral aspect of historical Jesus scholarship. Therefore we also invite our foreign colleagues to be most welcome to contribute to this journal. We, further, invite our colleagues in Finland to put on international display the theses they have presented for the Finnish audience. So we can take full advantage of this particular character of the journal.

The issues of IESUS ABOENSIS do not follow any thematic or other collecting principles. Each issue will at a minimum consist of two editorial scholarly contributions as well as two scholarly articles, one domestic and one international. The present issue is a case in point.

Tom Holmén, Editor in Chief