



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 the opinions of many, the quest is facing several predicaments. However, an academic study of the historical Jesus cannot take this as an exceptional state of affairs. To be noted by all generations:

The academic study of the historical Jesus should not be discouraged by the diversity of its results. The next to ubiquitous lack of unanimity, the diversity of opinions that pervades and is discernible sometimes even in minor questions – all of this simply comes with the territory. It is the hallmark, bane and blessing, particularly of humanistic research. It is also consistent with the liberal basis of free research and universities with no denominational or other predetermined agenda reigning in.¹ Make no mistake, even new approaches that start with but a few voices in a choir of unison will sound more like a crowd of mere soloists after a while.² The bottom line is: this is no exceptional quandary that should lead to existential reflection.

The academic study of the historical Jesus should not let the diversity of motives spurring the questers bother. While there are religious, political, cultural, artistic, fictional, romantic, psychological, financial, apologetic, and no doubt several other reasons to engage in conversing about Jesus of Nazareth, it is good to realize that such a mixture is specific not only to Jesus research or to liberal arts, but to humankind. In the conversation, however, only the scholarly language of argumentation is

-
- 1 Finnish Constitution §16: “The freedom of science, the arts and higher education is guaranteed.” Cf. further, T. Holmén and S. E. Porter, “Introduction: The Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus in Perspective”, T. Holmén and S. E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus: Volume 1: How to Study the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. xv–xxi (xviii).
 - 2 Cf. J. Becker’s revealing assessment of the promises of new approaches, synchronic readings of text (instead of diachronic ones) being the example: “[T]he sheer variety of synchronic methodologies and results, which is increasing all the time, is itself a corrective to the [sc. initial] high assessment of the potential of these methodologies to yield results. The relativities of the old methodologies no longer look quite so faded. And this makes it possible to live in a common relativity and a complementary coexistence.” See J. Becker, “The Search for Jesus’ Special Profile”, Holmén and Porter, *Handbook*, pp. 57–89. The quotation is from p. 73.

employed.³ To be sure, the language is far from being trouble-free and a successful conversation is many times hard-won – hence, too, the diversity of the results – but this is nothing exceptional either.

Further, as a highly specialized branch of research, the academic study of the historical Jesus is better off not feeling awkward about its idiosyncratic features. All research targeted in a very specific way or focusing on a very specific target will in the course of time develop features, for instance methods, that make it look peculiar when compared with other fields of study. However, such methods are in many cases good and necessary. As with historical Jesus research, the endeavor to share as much ground as possible with common historical thinking is also good and necessary but should not cause undue worry: everything cannot and should not be dovetailed.

Also, the academic study of the historical Jesus does not need to mind about the postmodern demand to succumb to *its* great narrative.⁴ In general, historical research outlived the heyday of postmodernism in the 1990s and is also already past the aftermath phase of that challenge. It has embraced and learned what there is to embrace and learn from the postmodern. And even if it still continues to embrace and learn, it no more needs to be listed as endangered. Here there is certainly some common ground for Jesus-of-history-research worth sharing with up-to-date general historiography: how to pick up the lessons of postmodern theorizing without eventually coming to the conclusion that one should stop writing history.⁵

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 enterprises like this possible. 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

3 Holmén and Porter, “Introduction”, p. xvi.

4 Cf. S. McKnight, “The Parable of the Goose and the Mirror: The Historical Jesus in the Theological Discipline”, T. Holmén and S. E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus: Volume 2: The Study of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 919–951 (938).

5 Cf. the comment of R. Evans in D. A. Yerxa (ed.), *Recent Themes in Historical Thinking: Historians in Conversation* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 24: “There was a widespread feeling of an epistemological crisis [sc. in historiography during mid- to late 1990s]. ... [First t]here is a tendency for new methodological and theoretical approaches to begin by proclaiming their universal validity and their power to revolutionize the whole of historical study. Then ... they become subspecialties with their own journals and societies where their adherents talk mainly to one another. And that is exactly what has happened to the extreme relativists among the postmodernists. ... Their extreme skepticism that they voiced about historical knowledge has now subsided into a rather marginal phenomenon. After all, the only possible reaction from historians who actually did accept these notions was to stop writing history.”

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.

Tom Holmén, Editor in Chief