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SUMMARY

In the year 2000 the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth two millennia ago is celebrated. If Jesus was seen as merely a historical figure, the significance of his life would be no different from that of people like Socrates or Alexander the Great. In Greco-Roman culture Alexander the Great, among other heroic figures and emperors, was regarded as son of God. However, since the first century followers of Jesus have worshipped Jesus as God's son. This study asks questions as to the importance of Jesus within Hellenistic-Semitic and Greco-Roman contexts and his continued importance today. The first aspect is studied from a social-cultural perspective and the second from the angle of both the (Christian) believing community and the (secularized) university. Chapter one deals methodologically with the fact that, as in the case of Socrates, Jesus did not himself put to pen either the message of his words and deeds or the interpretation of his birth and death. Jesus' vision should therefore be deciphered from what others said about him. Identifying a research gap with regard to existing Jesus research, chapter two will specifically aim at showing that today a new interdisciplinary frame of reference has come into being in the social sciences within which historical Jesus research is carried out. In chapter three it is argued that the starting point of the quest for the historical Jesus could be the nativity stories, despite all their mythological elements. Yet, in taking such a step, one should be aware of historiographical pitfalls when one studies the process of the "historization" of myth. In chapter four, entitled the "Joseph trajectory", it is demonstrated that Joseph, the father of Jesus, should probably be seen as a legendary figure. With the help of cross-cultural anthropology and cultural psychology chapter five explains an ideal-typical situation of someone in first-century Herodian Palestine who bore the stigma of being fatherless, but who trusted God as Father. In chapter six the tradition about Jesus' relationship towards "fatherless" children and "patriarchless" women is studied. Chapter seven shows that the "myth of the absent father" was very well known in antiquity. Ovid's story of Perseus (who was conceived virginally) is retold. The intention is to show why the second-century philosopher Celsus thought that the Christians unjustifiably mirrored this Greek hero, son of Zeus, in their depiction of

Jesus. Other examples within Greek-Roman literature are the myths surrounding among others Hercules and Asclepius. In explaining Hercules' adoption as son of Zeus (which implies his deification), the Greek writer Diodorus Siculus tells the story of an empty tomb and an ascension to heaven. The Roman writer Seneca also tells the story of Hercules' divine conception and his adoption as child of Zeus. In the New Testament Paul (Seneca's contemporary) is particularly known for the notion "adoption to become God's child". This notion is explained in the light of the parallels found in Seneca's tragedies about Hercules, his satire on the emperor Claudius and the references by Diodorus Siculus and in the *Carmina Priapea* to the notion of "adoption" and miraculous conceptions of god-like human figures. Chapter eight focuses on the origins of the church and the development of the dogma of the "two natures" of Jesus as both human and divine. In the last chapter the continued importance of the historical Jesus today is discussed. One of the most urgent social problems of our time is that millions of children are growing up fatherless. This study is about the historical Jesus who filled the emptiness caused by his fatherlessness with his trust in God as his Father.

Keywords

Historical Jesus

Son of God

Hellenistic-Semitic context

Graeco-Roman context

Interdisciplinary research

Historicization of myth

Joseph trajectory

Fatherlessness

Adoption as child of God

Deification (apotheosis)

OPSOMMING

In die jaar 2000 word die geboortedag van Jesus twee millenia gelede gevier. Indien Jesus as bloot net nog 'n historiese figuur gesien word, sal die betekenis van sy lewe op dieselfde vlak lê as mense soos Sokrates en Aleksander die Grote. In die Grieks-Romeinse kultuur was Aleksander die Grote, soos sekere andere heroïese figure en regeerders, as seun van God geag. Sedert die eerste eeu het Christene egter Jesus as seun van God aanbid. In hierdie studie word ondersoek gedoen na sowel die betekenis van Jesus se lewe teen die agtergrond van die Hellenisties-Semitiese en Grieks-Romeinse kontekste as sy volgehoue belang vir die gemeenskap in die hede. Die eerste aspek word bestudeer vanuit 'n sosiaal-kulturele perspektief en die tweede vanuit beide die invalshoek van die Christelike geloofsgemeenskap en die universiteit. Hoofstuk een gaan metodologies in op die feit dat Jesus, soos ook Sokrates, nie self sy boodskap en betekenis van sy optrede neergeskryf of sy geboorte en en dood geïnterpreteer het nie. Jesus se visie moet daarom ontrafel word vanuit wat ander oor hom gesê het. In hoofstuk twee word, wat bestaande ondersoeke na die historiese Jesus betref, 'n bepaalde navorsingsleemte geïdentifiseer en word aangedui dat resente navorsing deur interdisiplinêre studies gekenmerk word. In hoofstuk drie word redes aangetoon waarom die onderhawige ondersoek by die geboorte- en kindheidsvertellings begin ten spyte van die mitologiese aard daarvan. Hoofstuk vier is getitel "Die Josef-trajek". In hierdie hoofstuk word argumente verskaf waarom Josef, volgens tradisie die vader van Jesus, as 'n legendariese figuur beskou kan word. Met behulp van kruis-kulturele antropologie en sosiale psigologie word 'n ideaal-tipiese situasie van 'n "vaderlose" figuur in die eerste-eeuse Herodiaanse Palestina in hoofstuk vyf bespreek. Hoofstuk ses bestudeer die tradisies van die historiese Jesus ten opsigte van kinders sonder vaders en vroue sonder patriarge in hulle lewe. Hoofstuk sewe toon aan dat die "mite van die afwesige vader" 'n welbekende literêre tema in die antieke kultuurgeskiedenis is. Die storie van Ovidius oor Perseus (wat "maagdelik verwek" is) word oorvertel om aan te toon waarom die tweede-eeuse filosoof Celsus die volgelinge van Jesus beskuldig het dat hulle ongeregverdig Jesus met die Griekse held Perseus vergelyk het. Ander

voorbeelde in die Grieks-Romeinse literatuur is die mites oor onder andere Herkules en Asklepios. Wanneer die Griekse skrywer, Diodorus Siculus, Herkules se aanneming as seun van Zeus berig (wat neergekom het op Herkules se vergoddeliking) vertel hy die storie van ‘n “leë graf” en ‘n “hemelvaart”. In die tragedies van die Romeinse skywer, Seneka, oor Herkules word soortgelyke vertellings oor Herkules se goddelike verwekking en vergoddeliking aangetref. In die Nuwe Testament is dit veral Paulus, ’n tydgenoot van Seneka, wat die uitdrukking “aanneming tot seun van God” gebruik. Hierdie Pauliniese uitdrukking word verduidelik in die lig van die parallele in Seneka se tragedies oor Herkules en Seneka se satire oor keiser Klaudius asook verwysings by Diodorus Sikulus en in die Priapea Liedere. Hoofstuk agt fokus op die oorgang van Jesus na die begin van die kerk en op die ontstaansgeskiedenis van die dogma oor Jesus se “menslike natuur” en “goddelike natuur”. In die laaste hoofstuk word ingegaan op die vraag na die eietydse belang van Jesus. Een van die dringendste sosiale vraagstukke van ons tyd is die groeiende wêreldwye tendens dat kinders vaderloos grootword. Hierdie studie handel oor die historiese Jesus wat ‘n soortgelyke “leegheid” met sy vertroue in God as Vader gevul het.

Sleutelsterme

Historiese Jesus

Seun van God

Hellenistiese-Semitiese konteks

Grieks-Romeinse konteks

Interdissiplinêre ondersoek

Historisering van mite

Josef-trajek

Vaderloosheid

Aanneming tot seun van God

Vergoddeliking

Conclusion

This study is partly about the historical Jesus and partly about the early Jesus movements. Both parts are studied against the background of the intermingled contexts of the Judean, Herodian Galilean, Hellenistic-Semitic and Graeco-Roman worlds in mind. From a socio-historical perspective Jesus is compared with Greek semi-gods and deities and with Roman emperors who were worshipped as sons of God. The dissertation aims at arguing that the starting point for the quest for the historical Jesus could be the nativity stories, despite its mythological elements. In existing historical-critical research Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist has been the point of departure for the reconstruction of his words and sayings within a coherent framework. In this study it is demonstrated that Joseph, the father of Jesus, could probably be seen as a legendary figure. The study also focuses upon Jesus' interaction with fatherless children and women without husbands in a patriarchal society. The study concludes with the question as to the continued importance of Jesus today. One of the most urgent social problems of our time is that millions of children are growing up fatherless. This study is about the historical Jesus who filled the emptiness caused by his fatherlessness with his trust in God as his Father.