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**Jossa, Giorgio**

*Il processo di Gesù*

Studi biblici 133

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In number 133 of the series *Studi biblici*, Jossa offers a thorough examination of the trial of Jesus. In the first chapter, Jossa describes how the actions of Jesus, the political situation in Palestine, and the opponents of Jesus all combine to set the stage for what truly is inevitable given the circumstances: the execution of Jesus. Once the reasons for the trial of Jesus are established, Jossa offers a description and evaluation of the sources at our disposal for a reconstruction of the trial, Aside from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John he also examines non-Christian sources as well. Finally, Jossa ponders the differences between the accounts of Mark, Luke, and John and considers those differences and their significance for historical reconstruction. The third chapter is the heart of the book, and the central arguments are here presented. Considered here are the trial before the Sanhedrin, the arrest of Jesus according to Jewish legal guidelines; the trial as religiously motivated (in contrast to the trial before Pilate as politically motivated); the actions of Caiaphas; and the motive for conviction. Amidst this brief discussion is a recounting of Lietzmann's criticism of Mark.

Chapter 4 focuses on Jesus and Pilate. Here the emphasis is on the trial as politically motivated. The figure of Pilate is also briefly examined. The conclusion follows the fourth chapter, and a series of interesting appendices are attached: the Sanhedrin; the trial

before Herod; and the trial of James. The volume concludes with an index of sources and authors.

Jossa offers five major conclusions as the result of his study: (1) “I vangeli non sono stati scritti per raccontare con precisione storiografica la vita di Gesù, ma per testimoniare la fede della comunità in Gesù messia e figlio di Dio.” (2) “Il quadro storico offerto dai vangeli, confermato com’è dalle testimonianze esterne ... appare però nel complesso credibile.” (3) “Il problema più difficile è nella scelta e nell’uso delle testimonianze.” (4) Il dato fondamentale del vangelo di Marco, lo svolgimento cioè di due processi successivi a carico di Gesù, uno da parte del prefetto romano, per quanto spesso messo in questione per quel che riguarda la fase giudaica, è del tutto credibile e trova la sua spiegazione nella situazione politicoamministrativa della Giudea sotto il dominio romano, una situazione nella quale il sinedrio aveva il potere di svolgere processi ma non di condannare a morte.” (5) “Il reato (religioso) per cui è stato condannato Gesù dal sinedrio (la bestemmia di Mc. 14,64) ... nell’affermazione “blasfema” di essere il messia—figlio dell’uomo” (121–22).

(1) The Gospels were not written in order to recount with historical precision the life of Jesus but in order to testify to the faith of the community in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. (2) Is that which is offered from the Gospels confirmed as a historical picture from external testimony? It appears so. (3) The more difficult problem is in the choice and use of the various witnesses. (4) The fundamental data of the Gospel of Mark, the development, that is, of two trials of Jesus, one by the Roman prefect and one by the Jewish leadership, is of all the historical options the most credible one and finds its explanation in the politico-administrative situation of Judah under Roman dominion, a situation in which the Sanhedrin had the power to carry out trials but not to condemn to death. (5) The crime (religious) of blasphemy found in Mark as the reason for the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin (14:64) seems to be based on his claim to be the Messiah, the Son of Man.

What do we learn here from Jossa? First, we learn that he is a gifted writer who can put thoughts to page with clarity and precision. What might take some authors 400 pages to accomplish, Jossa accomplishes in nearly 150. In a time when historical Jesus studies are growing exponentially and book lengths are keeping pace, it is extremely refreshing to read a monograph that gets to its point and moves on to the next without belaboring every sentence with a plethora of footnotes.

Second, Jossa teaches us that the Gospels can be correlated and trusted to a certain degree regarding the life of Jesus (and his death). Yet even amidst this trust is a healthy skepticism that allows him to continue to question the source materials as to their veracity

and reliability. Jossa is absolutely correct to conclude that the Gospels are theology rather than historiography or biography, and he is also correct to say that, with that being said, they still offer us some historical facts.

Third, Jossa reminds us, through this genuinely engaging work, that “there is nothing new under the sun,” for though he is thorough and precise and terrifically engaging, there is nothing remarkably new or groundbreaking here. However, this is not a bad thing. For though numerous scholars, especially in our field, believe that new books must make new claims, must forward the pool of knowledge, must say something different, this simply need not be the case. The driving notion that “newer is better” is a falsehood. Truth is ageless, and when Jossa offers us here his considerable knowledge on the trial of Jesus, he allows us to refresh what we learned before and, in refreshing it, reinvigorate our interest in this most central of issues in the study of the historical Jesus. This reviewer recommends this book highly.