

Book Review

Bauckham, R., *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans, 2006.

Richard Bauckham's arguments in the book are inspirational, because this book has made him the pioneer in the study of 'Jesus of Testimony'. He has adopted a detective way of investigating the oral traditions of the early Christianity.

The argument of Bauckham is that the texts of the Gospels are close to the eyewitness reports of the words and deeds of Jesus. Bauckham introduces "Jesus of Testimony" as a new paradigm instead of the old paradigms, "historical Jesus" and "Christ of faith". He argues affirmatively that the written form of the individual as well as the shared memories of eyewitnesses gain greater importance in the Gospels as the names of the eyewitnesses are used in the narratives. Therefore according to him, written traditions are the Church's collective memory of the eyewitnesses regarding Jesus.

To support his hypothesis, Bauckham has brought in the views of Samuel Byrskoy on the eyewitnesses. Analysing the views of Bryskoy on the eyewitnesses, he makes his own conclusions; 1) the eyewitnesses were participants closest to the events and whose direct experiences enabled them to understand and interpret the significance of what they had seen. We could find the traces of testimony of such eyewitnesses in the Gospels. 2) the Gospel narratives are thus syntheses of history and story of the oral history of eyewitnesses and the interpretive and narrativising procedures of an author. 3) the eyewitnesses do not disappear behind a long process of anonymous transmission and formation of traditions by communities, but remain an influential presence in the communities as people who could be consulted and whose oral accounts lay at no great distance from the textualised form that the Gospels gave them.

Researching into the works of Bailey and Dunn on the eyewitness, Bauckham arrives at the following conclusions; 1) in the early Christianity, only the eyewitnesses were the ones qualified to recite the tradition in the public gathering. 2) Until the Jewish – Roman

War, oral tradition was prevalent in the villages of Palestine. Those who accepted the new rabbi as the expected Messiah recorded and transmitted data concerning him as the source of their identity. In the gatherings of the local Christian communities in pre-70 Palestine, the only people who would recite the tradition would have been eyewitnesses.

This book significantly acknowledges the eyewitness of the Twelve. Bauckham states that if the Twelve were close companions of Jesus throughout his ministry and the first leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, they should have been authoritative transmitters of the traditions of Jesus and their role in the earliest Christian community would indicate that of authoritative transmitters of the saying of Jesus and authoritative eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' history. He opines that if any group in the earliest community was responsible for some kind of formulation and authorization of a body of Jesus' traditions, the Twelve are likely to have been the group. The list of the Twelve functions as naming the official body of eyewitnesses who had formulated and promulgated the main corpus of the Gospel traditions from which much of the content of these Gospels derives.

Bauckham has an elaborate discussion on the Petrine perspective in the Gospel of Mark. He argues that the Gospel reflects the way Peter, as an apostle commissioned to communicate the gospel of salvation, conveyed the body of eyewitness traditions that he and other members of the Twelve had officially formulated and promulgated.

By his work, Bauckham has shown new insights and ways of investigations to the query of formation of the Gospels. His work has brought in a turning point in the scholarly study of the Gospels. He has become a pioneer to the study of 'Jesus of Testimony'. This monumental book becomes the most important one to those who teach and study the Gospels. This book will be a stimulant for many scholarly debates on 'Jesus of Testimony'.

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