

**Kazmierski, C R 1996 — John the Baptist: Prophet and evangelist (Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament. Mary Ann Getty, Editor. Michael Glazier Books)**

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Carl Kazmierski teaches New Testament and early Christianity at the University of Ottawa (Ontario). He completed his doctoral studies in Germany under Rudolf Schnackenburg.

Kazmierski speaks of his work as a compilation of reflections on John the Baptist rather than an exhaustive study of the material. His aim is not to study texts but to make these texts 'come alive and speak to us so that we might understand and perhaps even be confronted by the mighty dynamic that underlies their very existence' (p 10).

The titles of the chapters are evocative: 'In the shadows of the kingdom'; 'Water in the wilderness'; 'Servants of the Kingdom'; 'Visions of the Kingdom'; 'In the age of the Messiah' and 'The Stones of Abraham'. In spite of these popular and imaginative approaches, the book is thoroughly academic and extremely well referenced. Such scholarship is evident in Kazmierski's discussion of the supposed Qumran connection, the social setting of John and the relationship between John and Jesus. The discussions are always logical and balanced, tending to caution and an academic reluctance to push the evidence beyond its natural confines.

What new insights does Kazmierski bring to the discussion about John the Baptist? Perhaps the most striking is his ability to produce what is both a very readable, and so accessible study, while at the same time dealing in a very skilful way with many of the critical debates which have, in the course of the centuries, gathered around the enigmatic figure of John. But there is more. The whole book is informed by cultural anthropology, specifically that of the Mediterranean world. Using Bruce Malina as his primary source Kazmierski skilfully integrates both the person and message of John in the light of the

values of shame and honour and against the backdrop of purity and pollution common to first century Judaism. Constant use of the Hebrew Bible allows him to draw attention to John's prophetic tradition. In the search, Kazmierski deals with five layers of tradition, the oldest being that of John as prophet and evangelist, drawing its source from Isaiah 40:3 and reflecting John's vision of ministry. The second level is that of John as an apocalyptic preacher of judgement, which Kazmierski links with a crisis among a group of Hellenists within the early Christian Movement and which was in line with their own experience of rejection. John as Elijah is the third level which followed Jesus' use of this idea. The fourth level is that of John as the forerunner of the messiah and was part of the process undertaken by the early Christian movement in redefining the messiahship of Jesus in the post-Easter period. The fifth level is John as the witness to the messiah found in the Fourth Gospel. Kazmierski argues that each level is to be appreciated in its own right but without sacrificing the beauty or integrity of the composite picture.

The book has a devotional overtone throughout, which does not detract from the sharpness of its academic nature, but may well leave some readers slightly puzzled. The style of the book is colloquial and frequent use is made of the first person (singular and plural). The book envisages a journey or pilgrimage (search) and closes with an appeal 'to meet God in the reality of our own existence, a call to justice-making and love, a call that offers to transform those "who partake of its life and perhaps even in their own time undergo the fate of its prophets."' Thus it is a call that leads to contemplation and to Sabbath' (p 118) — a paradoxical comment.

In conclusion, I recommend this as a very readable text for both academics and ministers of religion. It would serve as a very useful introduction to a detailed study of John the Baptist, as well as to anyone preaching on the topic.

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