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BOOK REVIEW

Ernst Käsemann. *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene: Unpublished Lectures and Sermons*. Edited by Rudolf Landau, with Wolfgang Kraus. Translated by Roy A. Harrisville. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 337 pp. Pbk. US\$30.00.

This is a translation of *In der Nachfolge des gekreuzigten Nazareners: Aufsätze und Vorträge aus dem Nachlass* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). The book falls into two parts: Biblical Essays (13 essays and lectures), and Church Conflicts (15 essays and lectures). Representative items in the first part are: “Beginning of the Gospel: The Message of the Kingdom of God” (1985), “The Righteousness of God in Paul” (1985), “Justification and Freedom” (1996), “Galatians 2:11–21: Law and Gospel” (1979), “The Sermon on the Mount—a Private Affair?” (1982), and “The Gospel and the Devout” (1975). Representative items in the second part are: “What ‘To Believe’ Means in the Evangelical Sense” (1980), “The Reformation Heritage Today” (1977), “The Righteousness of God in an Unrighteous World” (1983), “Prophetic Task and National Church” (1983), “Divine and Civic Righteousness” (1985), and “Mark 1:16–20: On Discipleship of the Coming One” (1985).

The book opens with a ten-page retrospective essay titled “A Theological Review,” written by Käsemann in 1996. He remarks:

I came to know [in youth, with the help of a youth pastor] that each one’s uniqueness, or in modern parlance, each one’s identity, is experienced only through the Lord or through the demons to which one surrenders. No one belongs to himself or herself. In various ways a person exists only in a participation to be discovered. It is not enough to demythologize texts with Bultmann. Before doing such, the world and human beings need to be demythologized, in, say, their self-mastery, their ideology, and the religious superstition to which they have surrendered. This takes place in the power of the gospel (p. xiii).

He understands the gospel, and the central theme of the New

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Testament, as proclaiming “the worldwide lordship of Christ,” and not just the cure of souls. He adds: “The pious person is not to become more and more pious. . . . What is required is the discipleship of the Nazarene” (p. xiv).

Käsemann links discipleship to the first commandment, on the assumption that this commandment is itself a gospel in virtue of offering the freedom of divine grace. He adds, however, that “the first commandment is made concrete in the Nazarene, and in the discipleship of the Crucified it preserves the divine power of liberation in a world beset by demons” (p. xvii; cf. p. 191). This power of liberation is expressed in “resistance to the world’s insanities,” such as in the resistance to the Nazis by the Confessing Church in the 1930s. In sum, then: “Discipleship of the Crucified leads necessarily to resistance to idolatry on every front. This resistance is and must be the most important mark of Christian freedom” (p. xxi). Käsemann’s leadership role in the Confessing Church exemplified such resistance.

According to Käsemann, the foundation for discipleship of Jesus is God’s *righteousness*, that is, the saving action of God toward humans. This righteousness is directed not toward the righteous but instead toward the godless. Käsemann identifies a common kind of practical atheism, found even among Christians, as follows: “The world is delivered over to demonic forces when we ignore the justification of the godless occurring in Christ, when we measure the neighbor or stranger by our worldview and morality instead of by God’s mercy, when we reserve the Crucified for ourselves. God’s righteousness applies to enemies.” (p. 184). Justification via God’s righteousness, then, does not come through human earning or merit, but only through grace and faith (p. 191).

Käsemann’s treatment of righteousness is decidedly practical, if not prophetic. He protests that “a condition in which a white minority gorges itself at the cost of an overwhelming majority and scandalously forces its own rules of play on the exploited is incompatible with the righteousness of God” (p. 192). More specifically: “The first commandment is also directed against the dance around the golden calf in the capitalistic economy, against its defense through an armament that scorns God and the earth”

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(p. 192). Disciples of Jesus obey the command “Follow me!” even when they do not know what the consequences will be in this earthly life. The reality is that “our Lord is no settled possession, like an account in our savings bank” (p. 312).

Käsemann’s emphasis on God’s liberating righteousness as powerfully redeeming the ungodly by grace is refreshing and important for discipleship. One should ask, however, whether the gospel and discipleship are served by a notion of *reconciliation* that goes beyond any notion of liberation. Käsemann doubts the significance of the idea of reconciliation in Paul’s gospel, but the idea of liberation seems to fall short of the center of the gospel of grace. Even so, Käsemann’s approach to righteousness that links the first commandment and the gospel deserves serious attention by anyone interested in discipleship.

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