

John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Re-thinking the Historical Jesus*, 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (Doubleday; New York 1991) x.484 pp.

The target audience of this first of a two-volume opus, as well as the Anchor Bible Reference Library, have been regaled in this book a provocative discussion of a number of introductory issues mainly to the study of Christology. The provocation comes not from some extreme position held by Meier concerning the historical Jesus; the author himself describes his work as "neither completely original nor in any sense definitive" (p. 13); this sample of brilliant research tends to steer equidistantly from both conservatives' reading of the available sources (basically the canonical Gospels cf pp.139-141) as strictly historiographical material [A good representative would be Roger T. Beckwith who in his study on the use of calendars and astronomy to determine the chronology of Jesus' passion "proves to be so uncritical in his use of Gospel material in the last part of his article" pp.430-431 note 111. For Beckwith's stance concerning the historical reliability of biblical material one should consult his major work *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (SPCK; London 1985)9], and progressives' treatment of this material as ideological and theological constructions with slight or no historiographical worth [I

would venture to mention Rudolph Bultmann and his demythologizing approach as representative of this group, cfr. p.28 note 25]. Meier's genius lies in his capacity to offer serene, simple, detached, honest, and more or less exhaustive exposition of complex issues; as his exposition of the various issues necessarily involved the employment of methodological strategies, it cannot but provoke debates especially from theologically minded readers and New Testament exegetes. In this review we shall go through Meier's contribution in this volume, and briefly expose some of its shortcomings in the hope of refining this excellent book of reference.

As stated by Meier in the Introduction to this volume (p. 13) and to the entire opus, the book under review constitutes the first half of a four-parts research project into the historical Jesus. Parts Three and Four will form the contents of the second volume which is yet to see the light of day. There the author will discuss Jesus' public ministry as well as the "momentous and tragic final days of his life". In this first volume we find Part One and Part Two besides the aforementioned Introduction (pp.1-17), two conventional maps of "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" and "The Galilee of Jesus' Ministry", two tables covering "The Family of Herod the Great" and "The Regnal Years of the Roman *Principes* (Emperors)" for the period 6-70 AD, a list of

abbreviations (pp.439-457) and indices of Scripture references (pp.459-466), of authors (pp. 467-473) and of subjects (pp.475-484).

In Part One (pp.19-201) entitled **Roots of the Problem** Meier tackles "all those messy issues of definitions, method, sources that most people – even scholars – would prefer to bypass to get to 'the good stuff'" (p.13). Part Two (pp.205-433) is entitled **Roots of the Person**; in it the author attempts to deal with the "most intractable point" of the quest for the historical Jesus, that is, his birth, the years of his development and his cultural background. This volume carries the Introduction (pp. 1-17) to the whole enterprise, but not the Programmed Epilogue, thus generating some editorial handicaps to the present publication, as we shall comment.

In introducing his work Meier describes the nature of the project, narrates the saga of its origins, illustrates some of the difficulties when embarking on projects like this ["Why join the legion of scholars who have peered narcissistically into the pool of the historical Jesus only to see themselves?" (p.3)], as well as the reasons for which these slippery paths may not be left untrodden [The problem of the researcher's objectivity features among the principal obstacles: "There is no neutral Switzerland of the mind in the world of Jesus research Whether we call it a bias, a *Tendenz*,

a worldview or a faith stance, everyone who writes on the historical Jesus writes from some ideological vantage point; no critic is exempt" (p.5)]. He then illuminates the reader on two methodological options, on the concept "marginal" in the book's title (pp.6-9) and on why two currently fashionable New Testament exegetical methods (sociological analysis and the modern literary criticism) have exercised so little influence on his own research (pp.9-12). The last two pages (12-14) of the introduction are left for the structure of the project as a whole. It is at this stage that we are informed of a planned Epilogue wherein Meier hopes to offer "some initial reflection both historical and theological on all that we will have seen" (p.13). Our author considers his two-volume work as nothing else but a "prolegomenon and an invitation to theologians" to appropriate from this particular quest what may be useful to the larger task of present-day Christology (pp.13-14). In other words, is Meier hoping to offer theologians through his historical research enough material to rewrite Christology?

Part One runs into seven chapters, treating basically three introductory issues. The first chapter (pp.21-40) is dedicated to the definition of the 'historical Jesus'. The reader may experience this necessary discussion as hair-splitting. "The historical Jesus is not the real Jesus, but only a fragmentary

hypothetical reconstruction of him by modern means of research” (p.31). The following four chapters have the available sources as their subject matter: the canonical books of the New Testament (chapter 2), Josephus (chapter 3), other pagan and Jewish writings (chapter 4), and finally, the *agrapha* and the apocryphal gospels [chapter 5: by the former Meier means “extracanonical sayings of Jesus” (p.112)]. It is from Meier’s handling of the existent sources as he evaluates each source for its historiographical worth, as well as from the following discussion on the criteria of historicity (chapter 6) that the reader gets an insight into the author’s mastery of his subject. Readers approaching the subject for the first time (supposing they survive the perusal of these pages rendered slow-paced by the many essential notes at the end of each chapter aimed at scholars), will find the survey of the sources “negative and disappointing” since the material available is not abundant: “The four canonical Gospels turn out to be the only large document containing significant blocks of material relevant to a quest for the historical Jesus. The rest of the N.T. offers bits and pieces, mostly in the Pauline Corpus. Outside the N.T., the only independent, non-Christian witness to Jesus in the 1st Century AD is Josephus....” (p. 139); but also his witnessing is not without its problems. Most other documents studied in the sources block

(pp.41-166) carry no relevance to the research for the historical Jesus either because they are found unreliable or because they prove to be closely dependent upon the primary sources which are the canonical Gospels. Readers coming to this monograph after meeting any of the popularizing (and confusing) essays such as that of the journalists Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (Corgi Books; Reading 1991) who link Jesus and his early Christian community to Qumran with its Essenes’ movement; or essays and monographs of scholars who esteem as of great historiographical value the apocryphal gospels or the Nag Hammadi codices like the *Gospel of Thomas* (Here I would quote John Dominic Crossan, *Four other Gospels. Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Winston; Minneapolis 1985); Id., *The Cross that Spoke. The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (Harper & Row, San Francisco 1988); such readers may either be relieved that things may not have happened in the manner these wild reconstructions of the historical Jesus have made the gullible believe, or take Meier as too conservative to have merited their attention. Concerning Jesus’ relationship to Qumran Meier declares that “there is no indication that Jesus was ever directly connected with the Qumran community. It is never mentioned in the documents found at or near Qumran, and his freewheeling

attitude toward the stricter interpretation of the Mosaic Law is the very antithesis of the superobservant Qumranites, who considered even the Pharisees too lax. All this has not kept some imaginative scholars from seeing Jesus and John the Baptist in certain Qumran texts. This simply proves that learned fantasy knows no limits" (p.94. cfr. 392). As regards the possibility that in the apocryphal gospels we may glean information about the historical Jesus that antedates the synoptic tradition and John, Meier writes on p. 123: "...we have probed enough representatives of the over-heated imaginations of various 2nd century Christians to show that critics like Crossan, Koestes, and James M. Robinson are simply on the wrong track. These apocryphal gospels are very important, but they belong in a study of the patristic Church from the 2nd to the 4th century. Unfortunately, the public and the press, not to mention publishers and universities, are much more interested in sensational studies about the N.T. than in 'dull' studies of the patristic Church. In recent years we have been witnessing the 'selling' of the apocrypha to those audiences under the guise of N.T. research and the quest for the historical Jesus. This is a misuse of useful material. There is nothing here that can serve as a source in our quest for the historical Jesus."

The present reviewer found Meier's discussion of the criteria of

historicity (pp. 167-195) complete, serene and honest. He distinguishes between primary and secondary (or dubious) criteria; he considers as primary the criterion of embarrassment, of discontinuity, of multiple attestation, of coherence, of rejection and execution, while he included among secondary criteria those of traces of Aramaic, of the Palestinian environment, of vividness of narration, of the tendencies of the developing synoptic tradition, and that of historical resumption. During the discussion of the individual criteria Meier stresses the limits of each "lest any single criterion seem a magic key unlocking all doors. Only a careful use of a number of criteria in tandem with allowances for mutual correction, can produce convincing results" (pp. 183-184). Later on in the same page he cautions against a mechanical application of the criteria: ".....the use of the valid criteria is more an art than a science, requiring sensitivity to the individual case rather than mechanical implementation. It can never be said too many times that such an art usually yields only varying degrees of probability, not absolute certitude" (p. 184).

Part One dedicated to the discussion of theoretical issues comes to an end in chapter 7 (pp. 196-201) where Meier examines the validity of research for the historical Jesus, given the tenuous results of such an exercise as well as the irrelevance of the results of this historical critical

study for faith in Jesus. He shares with Rudolph Bultmann and Martin Kähler the view that “the Jesus of history is not and cannot be the object of Christian faith” (p. 197), “..... The proper object of Christian Faith is not and cannot be an idea or scholarly reconstruction, however reliable. For the believer, the object of Christian Faith is a living person, Jesus Christ; who fully entered into a true human existence on earth in the 1st century A.D. and who now lives, risen and glorified, forever in the Father’s presence” (p. 198). The historical Jesus has no usefulness to people of faith. Yet Meier maintains that this quest for Jesus of history “can be very useful if one is asking about faith seeking understanding, i.e. theology, in a contemporary context” (p.198). “Theology is a cultural artefact; therefore, once a culture becomes permeated with a historical-critical approach, as has Western culture from the Enlightenment onward, theology can operate in and speak to that culture with credibility only if it absorbs into its methodology a historical approach” (ibid). “For contemporary Christology, this means that faith in Christ today must be able to reflect on itself systematically in a way that will allow an appropriation of the quest for the historical Jesus into theology. The historical Jesus, while not the object or essence of *faith* must be an integral part of modern *theology*” (emphasis his) (pp.198-199).

Meier’s own search for the

historical Jesus starts in Part Two (pp. 203-433) wherein he attempts to “sketch a rough picture of Jesus’ origins and background” “by carefully sifting the infancy Narratives of the Gospels and reviewing what we know about Palestine in general and Galilee in particular at the time of Jesus” (p.205). Although he does not share with most “total scepticism” as to the possibility of reconstructing what really happened, Meier warns that some of the facts about Jesus “can be affirmed with fair certainty or at least high probability” (p.220). The implication is that complete certainty is a commodity out of our reach. Part Two is made up of four chapters (8-11) with the eleventh and last chapter (pp. 372-433) taken up with the discussion of the general chronology for Jesus’ life. In chapter 8 Meier goes through the issues of Jesus’ proper name (*Yēšuaʿ*) (pp.205-208), birth and lineage (pp.208-230). Under the subtitle ‘birth and lineage’ are discussed a number of difficult problems: the historiographical worth of the Infancy Narratives (Mt 1-2; Lk 1-2) [pp.208-214: “.....some of the points of agreement (between Matthew and Luke) are generally accepted by scholars as historical”]; Jesus’ place of birth [pp.214-216 “.....Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem is to be taken not as a historical fact but as a *theologoumenon*, i.e. as a theological affirmation (e.g. Jesus is the true Son of David, the prophesied royal

Messiah) put into the form of an apparently historical narrative”]; his descent from David [pp.216-219 (“Jesus’ Davidic sonship should not be so quickly dismissed as a *theologoumenon* of the Infancy Narrative alongside his birth at Bethlehem”)]; virginal conception [pp.220-222 (“Taken by itself, historical-critical research simply does not have the sources and tools available to reach a final decision on the historicity of the virginal conception as narrated by Matthew and Luke”)]; and the question of Jesus’ illegitimate birth, in other words, whether we can push back to the first century AD the charge of illegitimacy made later by Celsus and some Jewish writers. Some scholars believe that Mk 6,3 and Jn 8,39-41 may indicate that this charge existed in Jesus’ lifetime. Meier discusses this question on pp.222-229 and arrives to a negative conclusion: “the theme of illegitimacy in John 8 – as in Mark 6:3 – must be judged a classic case of retrojecting later theological debates into an earlier text that shows no signs of such disputes” (p.229).

Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 have to be taken as one unit; they share a common title, and in both Meier tries to identify external and internal circumstances that could have exercised some influence on the formation and upbringing of this marginal Jew. A methodological caveat could not possibly fail to appear (pp.253-255): Given the problem of sources and our

consequent nescience of Jesus’ “hidden years” how can one hope to say anything worth-while about these years? Meier’s method for his reconstruction of Jesus’ “private” life in Nazareth appears on pp.253-254: “.....a certain interplay between salient aspects of his public ministry and well known facts about Judea, Galilee, and Judaism during the time of Jesus’ “hidden years” allows us to make a few educated guesses about some of the circumstances surrounding his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood.” In Chapter 9 Meier ventures educated guesses on what language Jesus spoke (pp.255-268: Aramaic); on whether Jesus was illiterate (pp.268-278: “he was literate, and his literacy probably extended beyond the mere ability to sign one’s name or to conduct basic business transactions [“tradesman’s literacy”] to the ability to read sophisticated theological and literary works and comment on them [“scribal literacy”]); and on whether Jesus was a poor carpenter (pp.278-285: woodworker rather than carpenter). In Chapter 10 (pp.316-371) Meier tries to say something about the particular family relationships that moulded Jesus’ individual experience. He first focuses on the immediate family of Jesus (pp. 316-332): his parents, and on whether Jesus had brothers and sisters [“Needless to say, all of these arguments, even when taken together, cannot produce absolute

certitude in a matter for which there is so little evidence. Nevertheless, if – prescinding from fourth and later church teaching – the historian or exegete is asked to render a judgement on the N.T. and patristic texts we have examined, viewed simply as historical sources, the most probable opinion is that brothers and sisters of Jesus were true siblings” (p.331)]. He then reviews the possibility of Jesus having been married (pp.332-345), and his status as a layman (pp.345-350). Concerning the former Meier concludes that “we cannot be absolutely sure whether or not Jesus was married. But the various proximate and remote context, in both the N.T. and Judaism, make the position that Jesus remained celibate on religious grounds the more probable hypothesis” (p.345). As regards the latter, even though Hebrews developed the theology of Jesus’ priesthood, the historical Jesus was in actual fact a layman. “We should think of Jesus as belonging to a pious Jewish laity that regularly went up to Jerusalem to worship even as it bewailed the failings of at least the upper-level priests who officiated there” (p.349). On pp.350-352 the author offers a summary of the origins and ‘hidden years’ of Jesus.

In the last chapter of this volume Meier tackles the thorny question of a chronology of Jesus’ earthly experience (pp.372-433). He unravels the tangle by stages. In an initial survey he tries to establish the

chronological termini within which the Jesus drama must have unfolded: AD 26-36 as the basic time frame for Jesus’ ministry; AD 28-33 as the period during which took place the death of Jesus; a short period before the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC set as the time span for the birth of the Nazarene. These elements of the chronology are basically confirmed by the N.T. (pp.377-382) (Cf. p.382 for preliminary conclusions). In the remaining pages Meier attempts to be more specific by closely examining the importance of the chronological detail in Lk 3,1-2 about the fifteenth year of Tiberius (pp. 383-386) and by disentangling the complex datations of the Last Supper and of the crucifixion of Jesus found in the Synoptics and in John (pp.386-402). In the process he opts for the Johannine chronology over against that of the Synoptic Gospels. Some conclusions:

- (a) Jesus died on April 7,30 AD;
- (b) He was born ca. 7 or 6 BC, a few years before the death of King Herod the Great that happened in 4 BC;
- (c) His ministry started around the year AD 27 or the beginning of 28;
- (d) When Jesus died he was about thirty-six years old;
- (e) Before he died Jesus celebrated “a solemn farewell meal with his inner circle of disciples on Thursday evening, 6th April”. This meal was not a Passover

meal but only "a special farewell meal" (pp.398-399).

Critique

i. John P. Meier belongs to a circle of American Catholic N.T. scholars who honoured Academia and Church with balanced, very serious, profound, open-to-a-wider-readership works that left a trail of heated debate and controversy behind them. I cannot see how the present contribution of Meier will prove to be an exception. Another prominent member of this circle is Raymond E. Brown whose publications are constantly referred to in the volume under review and with whom Meier published *Antioch and Rome. New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (Chapman; London 1983).

ii. *Some minor remarks*

(a) This elegantly and pleasantly printed monograph has its editorial Achilles' tendon in the present location of its abundant notes at the end of each chapter. Of course this is a feature of the literary genre termed "Doubleday Scholarly Publications". The current format facilitates reading by non-professionals but obstructs use of volume by "doctorial students and scholars" for whom the notes were compiled, and who will consult the book to see Meier's stance concerning the "more technical questions and detailed discussions" that have been relegated to the notes (p. 13).

(b) A more serious handicap for this volume has been the absence of a fully-fledged bibliography.

(c) However much one esteems Prof. David Noel Freedman, Meier's frequent references to private correspondence with this prominent scholar cannot be taken well. Checking of sources on one's affirmations or deductions are rendered very difficult in such cases.

(d) Pilate was "prefect or governor"? Cfr pp. 373.382.411.

iii) **Questions of Method.** Even if he considers most of the essays in Part Two as healthy discussions of the various issues that the same material give rise to, the present reviewer feels that Meier's exegesis leaves room for improvement.

(a) **Were Jesus' 'brothers and sisters' siblings?** Meier's treatment here seems to be following the pluridenominational collection of essays edited by Raymond E. Brown and Karl P. Donfield, *Mary in the New Testament* (Fortress; Philadelphia / Paulist Press; New York 1978), and is in dialogue with Josef Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu* (SBS 21; Stuttgart ²1967) and John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Doubleday; Garden City NY 1975). His discussion is serene and raises above denominational concerns and positions. His strategy seems focused on eliminating as valid contender the meaning 'cousin' in the Greek term *adelphos* as employed in the N.T.

But his contribution limps under three aspects:

1. Meier underestimates the Semitic background of N.T. with its force to fashion thought-patterns as well as style – see especially his discussion under the rubric “The New Testament is not Translation Greek” (pp. 325-327). The N.T. *adelphos* inherited from its antecedent Hebrew *’ah* its ambiguity (Cfr p.325).

2. Meier almost ignores the other possibility for the term *adelphos* to mean ‘kinsman’ ‘relative’. It is true that in note 45 p.363 he refers to and partially quotes Joseph A. Fitzmyer who concluded that the idea that the brothers of Jesus were kinsmen or relatives in the broad sense “is certainly not ruled out,” *A Christological Catechism. New Testament Answers* (Paulist Press; Ramsay NJ1981) 73. Meier comments: “But to say that an opinion cannot be ruled out is not to say that it is the most probable solution on purely linguistic and historical grounds”. However, once we admit the Semitic background for the N.T. especially for Matthew, and that *adelphos* may always carry the meaning ‘relative’ unless the context helps specifying further this meaning, Meier’s discussion on the relevant texts in Matthew and Paul (pp.320-324,326) needs to be revised [I found Meier’s handling of Mt 13,53-58 rather superficial. First, he has not noticed the presence of an ABA¹ structure: A = v.55a, B=vv.55b-56a; A¹=v.56b which shows that Matthew’s characters are passing a judge-

ment on Jesus himself not on his parents. Secondly, element B is itself an ABB¹A¹ structure: this would render Meier’s apologetic note 26 on p.358 amusing and unnecessary. These global and particular structures show that Matthew’s intention was not to separate the legal but not historical father of Jesus from Jesus’ real biological mother (cf p.323) .

3. Perhaps the stress on the witness of Hegesippus (pp.329-331) was not its worth because all we get from him is that in the 2nd and 3rd century Christianity there existed this interpretation of the brothers of Jesus business. We cannot prove therefrom that such was Matthew’s and Paul’s intention when they used the phrase. In view of what the present reviewer wrote “the most probable opinion” is not that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were siblings, but that the tradents knew that there were relatives of Jesus but they did not bother to specify their true relationship to Jesus because this was irrelevant; and it is this message that Mt 13,53-58 means to communicate. Had Meier applied his methodology consistently this topic would have followed that of virginal conception: “taken by itself, historical critical research simply does not have the sources and tools available to reach a final decision on its historicity (Cf p.222).

(b) **Fact or commentary?** Meier’s elaborate argumentation in favour of the view that considers “the basic outline of the Johannine chronology as the most likely” (p.395) hinges on

taking Mk 14,1a and Mk 14,12-16 as secondary or redactional (pp. 396-401). For the texts in Mark (and their parallels in the other synoptics which presumably depend upon Mark) are the only ones which describe Jesus' last meal with his disciples as a Paschal Meal. "Indeed, without 14,1+12-16 it would never cross the mind of the reader that this meal was supposed to be taken as a Passover meal" (p.39). John does not carry the episode though the consternation among the disciples on discovering that one of the twelve was to betray Jesus is also reported in Jn 13,21-30. It is also Mk 14,1a.12-16 that creates great difficulties for establishing a global chronology for Jesus' passion and death since the Paschal Lamb could be sacrificed on the 14th of Nisan to be eaten on the 15th starting on the evening of the fourteenth. How could Jesus hold the Paschal Meal without the Paschal Lamb [the solution apparently offered by Anne Jaubert, *Le date de la cène* (EBib; Paris 1957)]? So, if Meier could prove that Mk 14,12-16 (especially) was not an original story but only a commentary by the evangelist himself, he could disregard what Mark has to say on the preparations of the "paschal" meal for a reconstruction of what really happened, and rely solely on John who does not term this last meal of Jesus as a "Paschal Meal" but only as a solemn farewell meal given on Thursday evening. For a description of Mk 14,1a as coming from a

secondary or redactional stage of the tradition Meier depends on a number of scholars cited in note 92 p.425. For a similar judgement on Mk 14.12-16 he relies mostly on Eduard Schweizer *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (NTDI, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Göttingen²1968)169-170, while he is in dialogue with Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (CSM; London 1966) 15-88. Their arguments for this position are four:

- (a) the use of "disciples" in this short episode whereas in the context Jesus' retinue are called 'the Twelve';
- (b) lack of precision in the chronology of 14,1a.12 ["The examples of the loose application of the first day of unleavened bread" to mean "the fourteenth of Nisan are much later.....and occur in learned rabbinic discussions; they can hardly be presupposed in the popular parlance of a 1st-century Christian, be he of Jewish or Gentile origin" (Note 94 p.426). This led Meier to conclude "that whoever composed 14,12a not only was not an eyewitness to the original events but also cannot be trusted to give us exact detailed chronological information about the Last Supper" (Ibid.)];
- (c) the absence of the preparations episode in John;
- (d) that the general structure of the episode and whole verses (vv.13.16) echo the story of the finding of the donkey for Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem in Mk 11,1-6; "the whole of Mark 14,12-16 may have been con-

structed on that model" (Note 94 p.426).

A few comments are in order:

(1) Meier would have struck a better balance had he, together with authors favouring his form and redaction critical analysis of Mk 14,12-16, included representatives of the contrary view.

(2) The distinction between the traditional and the redactional in the Gospels, though formally possible, is of little, if any, exegetical value since the author formed the whole into his own new literary creature.

(3) It is not clear what Meier is seeking when reading the canonical Gospels. If in these writings we should expect a theological presentation rather than a historical reconstruction of what really happened, the present reviewer cannot see why in Mk 14,12 we should pretend to find the contribution of an eyewitness or an "exact detailed chronological information about the Last Supper".

(4) Suppose Mark is offering commentary rather than a historical reconstruction of what really happened during Jesus' last meal with his own disciples. The problem is that Matthew and Luke, assuming neither is prior to Mark, follow his line of interpretation. Is it simply because they are reproducing Mark? Besides Matthew is supposed to have emerged from a Jewish context and

would have noticed if Mark were not precise would have remedied. How are we to answer these queries? Shouldn't we instead ask why has John opted not to include the paschal dimension of Jesus' ultimate supper with his own?

(5) Perhaps the weakest aspect in Meier's discussion here is his failure to appreciate the literary dimension of the texts involved. This notwithstanding what he writes on pp. 11-2 on the contribution of modern literary criticism to the understanding of the text. Why should Mark choose to call Jesus' companions in 14,12-16 'disciples' while in the adjacent episode he calls them "the Twelve"? Is the only explanation possible the genetic one, that is, that Mark has employed a source with this characteristic word for feature? Is Mark a compiler of short episodes about Jesus or an author who employs material coming from different traditions to fashion something absolutely new and perhaps different? The historiographical approach, it appears from its application by Meier, reads the Gospels for whatever information of a historical nature it could glean, and pays little attention to the text in its globality.

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