

Defining Jesus: The Earthly, the Biblical, the Historical, and the Real Jesus, and How Not to Confuse Them

Richard N. Soulen



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Defining Jesus is about the semantic content of the name Jesus. To what does the name refer, especially when modifying adjectives are attached, such as "the historical Jesus," "the Jesus of history," "the earthly Jesus," "the biblical Jesus," "the real Jesus"? Problems arise when commercial writers and scholars, without the necessary caveat, equate their hypothetical portrait of "the historical Jesus" with "the real Jesus"--none other than the Jesus of the first century "as he actually was." To disabuse scholarship of this hubris, the author carefully delineates the diverse settings in which the name Jesus appears in the ongoing dialogue about Jesus of Nazareth. Its approach is apologetic: it defends the traditional language of Christian faith, arguing with Martin Kähler in the nineteenth century that the only Jesus Christians have ever known, or can know, is the Christ of faith.

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