

Samuel F., *Injil Barnāba bayna l-mu'ayyidīn wa-l-rāfiḍīn*, Cairo, Ph., 1998, 291 pp.

F. Samuel's study is a further contribution on the ongoing debate about the true value of the Gospel of Barnabas. The question, whether this is the only true Gospel of Jesus Christ or a willfull forgery from the European Middle Ages, has kept many Muslim and Christian apologists busy arguing with each other. The debate was very much fuelled by the first English edition of the text in 1907 by the Dante specialist Lonsdale Ragg and his sister Laura and its immediate translation into Arabic by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā in 1908. Many publications have been written since then, mostly Muslim authors (although not exclusively) trying to trace back a perfect isnād to early church history and to claim the Gospel of Barnabas to be the very, only true Gospel of Jesus Christ, intentionally held in hiding for about the first 15 centuries by the Christian church. Non-Muslims (some Christians, some not, plus a very few Muslim authors like one writing in the Muslim World League in 1977) are of the opinion that the Gospel of Barnabas must be a forgery, due to a variety of reasons deriving from the text itself as well as from outward 'proofs' like the early Christian church history. Nowhere in any form of literature was there ever found evidence for any other than the one Italian and two Spanish manuscripts, one of which seems to have completely disappeared from the scene.

The Gospel of Barnabas is of great importance for the Muslim-Christian encounter, because for Muslims the Gospel of Barnabas is regarded as the perfect 'proof' for the presumption that Islam existed from the time of Adam and Christianity is only a later derivation of Islam. The Gospel of Barnabas confirms some of the basic dogmas of Islam; like the annunciation of Muḥammad by Jesus, Jesus not having been crucified, the denial of Jesus' deity and sonship. For Christians, on the other side, and most non-Muslims, it goes without saying that these arguments don't count very much taking into consideration the many arguments from within the text of the Gospel itself. Hints, like the quality of the paper of the Italian manuscript, the language or the background depicted in the gospel, clearly point to a European author from the Middle Ages and not to early church history.

Samuel's book is clearly written from the Christian standpoint. Considering that it was published in Cairo, it may be seen as a late answer to Rashīd Riḍā's Arabic translation of the text which took the Arabic speaking world by storm and since then was handled as the 'original' of the 'lost' Gospel of which a Latin, Greek or Hebrew original was never found.

Samuel seems to be a prolific writer, focusing on issues of differing opinion and debate between Muslims and Christians, like the death of Jesus, his crucifixion, and resurrection. The present study could also be regarded as an enterprise to remove a stumbling block of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians.

First of all, Samuel's study surprises one by its comprehensiveness: every single argument which has been brought forth so far for and against the Gospel of Barnabas, seems to have been included in his book, the pros in order to refute, the cons in order to confirm. The author systematically categorizes any doubts and facts speaking against an early emergence and consequently, against the true value of the text. It can be said, that after having studied the dictionary-like collection of arguments which Samuel arranges like pieces of a puzzle only those who stay loyal to certain different presumptions may still be able to hold steadfast to the integrity of the text.

Samuel proves his profound knowledge of Christian as well of Muslim theology, of early church history, of Islam as such and its dogmatics. He starts at the beginning of the history of the Gospel of Barnabas, goes back to the very first instances in the 17th century, where this Gospel was mentioned in Europe (John Toland, Johann F. Cramer, Th. Mongey, Bernard de la Monnoye), he then follows the discussion in the Christian and the Muslim world (with statements from Muslim authorities like Abu Zahra) and gives the reader insight into the actual discussion. Samuel seems to have read and quoted almost anything having been published about this issue in the past.

At no point in the book, the author does hide his convictions or leave open which conclusions should be drawn from what he says. He tries to convince by carefully giving argument after argument adding up to an impressive collection. Therefore, the book seems to be meant for Muslims as well as for Christians.



Beginning in his introduction, Samuel strongly emphasizes already that for him the Gospel of Barnabas is clearly a forgery and nothing else than a forgery. He expresses his hope that his readers will be courageous enough to follow his discussion of the 'evident facts'. He emphasizes having studied all arguments for and against this gospel (which everybody is all too ready to believe) and found out 'from an impartial standpoint', that the Italian manuscript of the text was written in the 16th century by a Muslim author in Italy and composed to destroy the Christian creed. Samuel goes into every detail, analyzing the style, choice of words and contents of the text, he gives arguments from early church history, geography, political circumstances and the Old and New Testament.

Interestingly enough, the author also argues from what is missing in the Gospel of Barnabas, i.e., what he would expect from a true Gospel: an extensive report about the 'founder' of Christendom, Jesus Christ, his life and mission, outlines about the Christian creed and the country and the circumstances under which Christianity emerged. The Gospel of Barnabas does not fulfill those requirements, but is in contradiction to what is understood as the Christian creed and the contents of the Bible.

Samuel's chapter 2 (p. 23ff.) about the reasons why people still stick to the historical value of the Gospel is also interesting, whereas at the same time all arguments against it are openly discussed. Samuel clearly outlines that the Gospel of Barnabas is only held true by those who want to use it as a weapon against Christianity and the Christian creed, because it depicts Jesus as being only a prophet, denies his deity, his being crucified for the salvation of the world, and announces Muḥammad as the next prophet after Jesus' death.

The language of the book is easy to understand, so the conclusion might be drawn that the author did not want to be the influence of the book limited only to a small number of highly educated people but to let it speak for itself to as many people as possible. The book is free from polemic, very much based on facts, extremely thoroughly composed with an excellent quality of printing and binding. It is worth reading it for anybody interested in today's Muslim-Christian encounter.

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