

*Jesus against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict.* By Chris Keith. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014. Pp. xix + 188. \$22.99.

In this relatively brief study, Keith manages to combine brevity with lucidity and focus, while maintaining a style that is both scholarly yet accessible to the general public. The book examines the initial causes of conflicts between Jesus of Nazareth and what K. terms “the scribal elite,” that is, those formally trained as interpreters of the Torah. He argues that, although Jesus was not a member of the authoritative scribal elite class, he acted and spoke in ways that challenged their exclusive hold on the right to teach and, more significantly, to interpret Scripture. This resulted in an escalation in tensions and open conflict between Jesus and the Jewish educated elite, leading to Jesus’ arrest and execution.

The book’s major contribution is that it shifts the focus away from the content of Jesus’ teaching as the source of conflict to his role as teacher that leads to social discord and rivalry. K. interprets the conflict as a dispute about authority and social class rather than one about theology and religious practice. Hence he seeks to maintain Jesus’ fundamental Jewishness within the varieties of Second Temple Judaism while attempting to explain why his ministry would lead to conflict and ultimately execution as a criminal of the state. K. does not say that this was the only factor involved in Jesus’ death, but his approach adds to the complexity of the sociocultural factors that placed Jesus in opposition to various elites within the Roman-occupied territories of first-century Palestine.

Historical critics may want to question the thrust of K.’s argument that the “controversy stories” are fundamentally historical and not the product of later conflicts. One might also wonder whether this study does not depend upon a Marxist paradigm that few would accept without significant qualification. Nevertheless, I found reading the book refreshing because it challenges existing assumptions and offers new lines of inquiry into the historical Jesus and his ambiguous relationships with other contemporary teachers and practitioners of the Torah.

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*Translated Christianities: Nahuatl and Maya Religious Texts.* By Mark Z. Christensen. Latin American Originals. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2014. Pp. xiii + 135. \$29.95.

This compilation of previously published and new works by Christensen provides much food for thought. C. focuses on what is created when one culture encounters another in the readings and translations of these Nahuatl and Maya religious texts. The book demonstrates that engagements between different cultures can signal change in shared traditional stories. To exemplify this point, C. not only presents his translations of these texts but provides commentary and connections as to how these texts compare and contrast to others published in European and/or biblical languages.