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In The Study

A FULL-SCALE modern English commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel has long been awaited. The announcement of the Black New Testament Commentaries encouraged the hope that at last it would be provided. Mark and John have from many quarters received worthy contemporary treatment. Even Luke has attracted much discerning and provocative re-examination. If it sometimes seemed that the First Gospel always came in last in the Scholarship Stakes, we trusted that Dr. Filson[1] would drastically rearrange the field.

Indeed he has given us riches. Here are more than forty pages of introductory material and two hundred and fifty of translation and commentary. The Gospel is not artificially isolated, but always seen in the widest biblical context and with special attention to Synoptic relationships. Aim and attitude are undeviatingly expository. Critical knowledge is never obtruded for its own sake, but made subservient to the task of interpretation. Of course Dr. Filson would have liked more space. But he exploits the limitations set upon him. His style is masterly. There are no long prosy sentences. Every word is made to count. The only obscurity is mathematical! In the parable of the unmerciful steward the problem of translating talents into pounds and dollars finally defeats the commentator. But the slip is remarkable because so exceptional.

This is a book for the plain man who wants to take Scripture seriously. Herein is its strength—and something of its disappointment. The publishers inform us that this series of commentaries are "full enough for serious academic work." But it is just here that questions arise in the mind. I miss the kind of treatment and material provided so effectively by T. W. Manson in *The Sayings of Jesus*—a book which significantly is missing from the bibliography. And I note the absence of any sense of a controlling motif that imparts special structural form and unity to the Gospel.

Now without doubt Dr. Filson would have his defence. He will draw attention to the varied readership he is commissioned to serve. He will point out his own suspicion of those who read into Scripture all sorts of modern patterns and discover all sorts of keys that were never there at all. He will remind us of his own conviction that Matthew has provided a manual of Christian teaching. He may even add that teaching tends inevitably to be or to seem pedestrian to the scholar precisely because it is concerned with the edification of the ordinary church member.

[1] *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, by F. V. Filson (A. & C. Black, 28/-). 1960.

All this is sound sense. If the First Gospel was primarily intended as a vehicle of Christian teaching for the instruction of the converted, then a commentary upon it which echoes its aim and is directed to its audience must merit praise. But that praise will be no less sincere for being accompanied by the conviction that another commentary for the academic student still needs to be written.

It is a revived concern for Scripture and its exposition that seems to the Protestant to be one of the encouraging marks of Rome in our day. But what does the Ecumenical Movement look like to the Roman Catholic Church? How does that Church react to the World Council of Churches which occupies so prominent a position in the ecumenical scene? These are important questions which Protestant leaders are finding it increasingly necessary to ask; and for searching and sympathetic answer they could not do better than look to a volume[2] from the pen of the Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Heythrop College. Father Leeming is now a familiar figure at World Council gatherings. He speaks with knowledge of his theme distilled from deep and prolonged encounter with men and books alike. He offers an impressive study in ecumenism.

The presentation he provides falls essentially into two parts. The one traces the rise and development of the Ecumenical Movement and its organ, the World Council, and delineates governing factors, shifts in thinking and emphasis, strains and stresses. This is a notably fair and accurate summary of a complex movement and situation. The other sets ecumenism and the Roman Church in fruitful encounter, probes the mutual reactions, and makes plain the principles that have governed and do govern the "Catholic" approach to the new situation. This contains the sections that will command most interest and attention. They are of high value not least because af the clear statement of key facets of Roman faith and Roman ecclesiology that they offer. Concluding appendices register important pronouncements from both sides of the Great Divide.

Those of us who do not accept the Roman position are not thereby absolved from seeking to understand it; and this is no easy task even when we have begun to recognize the distortions of so much of the writing of Church history in the past. Protestants speak much of Roman intransigence, and complain sometimes that the World Council pays too much attention to Rome. Perhaps it is time that we bluntly confessed that in one sense at least Rome has served us well. She has stood as a silent indictment of all facile and superficial solutions to our divided situation, has borne innate testimony to the profound depths from which unity springs and at which alone it may be reclaimed. Now that the search of the World

[2] *The Churches and the Church,* by Bernard Leeming (Darton, Longman & Todd, 35/-). 1960.

Council has reached these deeper levels, Rome can and will begin to take her seriously. So long as the Faith and Order Division is kept central in the World Council, we may expect that Rome will continue so to do.

Father Leeming writes from faith and prayer and love; and constantly he tries to understand. He does not always quite succeed. This is the tragedy of disunity. But he has come a long way, and Protestants are in his debt. It is only to be regretted that those who most need to read this valuable book will probably not open it.

Clearly the road to reunion cannot bypass profound theological thinking; and we welcome it from wherever it comes. The enduring value of lectures on Christian Doctrine given twenty years ago to students at the University of Cambridge ensures for their author eager attention to the publication of fresh lectures on the Christian Doctrine of Redemption.[3] We look for discerning exposition of those things which lie at the very centre of our faith, and we are not disappointed. The vexed problems of time and history are not ignored or quickly brushed aside. The full scope of the redemptive activity is recognized by the inclusion of discussion of church, sacraments, and the resurrection of the body. But the heart of this book treats inevitably of the saving work of the Lord in terms of an atonement at once redemptive, expiatory, and penal.

The qualities of mind and spirit that made Dr. Whale's earlier work famous are here amply displayed. We must not look for the exhaustive examination, whether expository or theological, nor for the presentation of new realms of truth. What we may expect and shall find is a wide learning, a balanced appraisal of the best of contemporary thinking, a limpid prose style, and above all a massive sanity of judgment. This book is a joy to read. It is more than can be said of most.

The most valuable sections are those which deal with the redemptive and expiatory work of Christ, which speak of him in terms of victor and victim, which set the atonement against the background of battlefield and altar. The discussion of Satan, with its reminiscences of Lutheran insight and daring, is specially noteworthy. So is the exposition of biblical sacrifice. Dr. Whale has surely got this exactly right. We need the reminder that in the Old Testament, outside the great Servant Song, sacrifice and sin-bearing are mutually exclusive ideas and activities. It is the Lamb of God alone who transmutes penalty into sacrifice.

It is, however, just when we approach the examination of Christ as criminal, of the penal aspect of atonement, that the limitations of *multum in parvo* begin to emerge. We have forcibly emphasized for us the slenderness of the biblical basis for the "juridical concept of vicarious penalty"; and a radical question

[3] *Victor and Victim*, by J. S. Whale (Cambridge University Press, 18/6d.). 1960.

mark is placed against any simple substitutionary interpretation of the Cross. But this profound question demands a more extended discussion than Dr. Whale has found himself able to provide, and there is a tantalisingly elusive quality about the pointers and signposts he offers. It is the same issue that arises over his fragmentary treatment of universalism. His weighty enunciation of the reasons for this conviction is beyond criticism. But a fuller treatment could scarcely have avoided a reckoning with the paradox that arises when we seek a harmony of the ontological and the existential verdict on this vexed question.

Particular attention will be accorded to the defence of infant baptism. Without doubt it will be compared with the earlier apologia in *Christian Doctrine*. The fuller discussion now provided reveals significant changes of emphasis across the years. So far as argument is concerned, the faith of the Church is out, the solidarity of the family in. Infant baptism is in the end a logically irresistible implication. I must confess that for my own part I prefer *Christian Doctrine*. The short statement there had a sort of impressive and classic simplicity. The more detailed the paedo-baptist argument, the less convincing it seems to be.

One of the most valuable recent contributions to the paedobaptist controversy was the careful examination of early Church practice undertaken by the Professor of Theology at Gottingen. This is now available to us in English translation.[4] It enshrines a painstaking search for infant baptism from the New Testament itself to the end of the fourth century. The general literary evidence is supplemented by reference to the testimony of inscription and archaeology. It is a fascinating path along which Dr. Jeremias so surely conducts us.

His conclusion is that the baptism of infants born to Christian parents is a practice that goes back to New Testament times, and that it can be traced onwards in almost unbroken line through the centuries. To this generalisation there are but two qualifications. There is no early trace of paedobaptism in Eastern Syria; and there is a curious break for a generation after about 330 A.D. In the one case, it is argued, this is due to Gnostic/Marcionite influences; in the other, to Hellenistic superstition that accompanied the influx of pagans to a state religion.

How far has the case been proved? Substantially—though not quite all the way. It seems difficult to doubt that infant baptism was an established practice by the second century. The dictum of Loofs, popularised by Wheeler Robinson: "Infant baptism, first demonstrable in Irenaeus, still contested by Tertullian, was for Origen an apostolic custom," remains verbally true but conveys a

[4] *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, by J. Jeremias. (S.C.M. Press Ltd., 12/6d.). 1960.

quite erroneous impression of the evidence. Similarly, it is clear that all the weight of Jewish background and Jewish antecedents bears on the paedo-baptist scale. Nevertheless, the paucity of the evidence at certain crucial points continues to baffle and to annoy. This book indeed offers a wealth of material. But the careful reader will note how often it deals with necessary assumptions and logical implications, just because the *facts* are missing.

It is within the New Testament itself that the uncertainties are greatest and perhaps, in the end, most significant. Were the children born to Christian parents baptized in this age? Jeremias finds but three relevant passages: 1 Cor. 7 : 14; Acts 21 : 21; Mark 10 : 13-16, and parallels. He now agrees that the first of these has nothing to do with baptism. The second gives him "probabilities," but only on the basis of a debatable use of Col. 2 : 11. It is upon the Gospel passage(s) that main emphasis is rested. Certainly, a more weighty and broadly based argument than that of Cullmann is advanced. But inevitably the doubts remain.

It is surely high time that it was explicitly recognized that, owing to the nature of the sources and the material, paedobaptists can hardly be expected to produce any stronger evidence for this case than they have now done. That it fails to be conclusive belongs to the nature of the situation. Further advance, as Jeremias himself recognizes, can be expected only in the context of consideration of the whole variety of baptismal practice and baptismal theology in this formative period.

It was in preparation for the Lambeth Conference of 1958 that the Bishop of Southwell wrote a short study, *Vocation and Ministry*, which attempted to promote thought and discussion upon one of the burning issues for the Church of our day. That concern has been taken a stage further in another work[5] that explores some of the problems of Church and Ministry. It is a slender study. It is written in leisurely style. It throws together a wide diversity of material that does not obviously cry out a close-knit common theme. It is wholly concerned with the Anglican situation. It bears the imprint of the liberal wing of the Church of England. All these factors must be borne in mind in making an assessment of it. Because of them I find it just a little disappointing. Of course a book must be judged for what it is, not for what we might like it to be. The author is asking questions not claiming to provide the answers. He writes as a liberal Anglican for Anglicans he would like to see more liberal. But his theme is of such importance to us all and his questions are almost always so exactly right that a more systematic and co-ordinated presentation would have commanded from us even more gratitude.

[5] *Asking the Right Questions*, by F. R. Barry (Hodder & Stoughton, 12/6d.). 1960.

Dr. Barry is in no doubt but that Christian advance is and will be heavily dependent upon the Christian Ministry. We need more ministers. We should be urgently considering the use of our laity for supplementary work in this field. But if the full-time professional Ministry remains pivotal, then searching questions must be asked about recruitment and training. The final disaster would be to substitute quantity for quality. We need more clergy, but they must be clergy highly trained. We must provide intensive theological education, but it must express an understanding of theology that ranges beyond the ecclesiastical and the narrowly religious.

With these cardinal theses surely no wise man will quarrel. Would that they commanded as prominent an exponent in each of the Free Churches! If I am left with doubts, they mainly concern Dr. Barry's estimate of the contemporary situation. He thinks liberalism has become disreputable; but I wonder. Certainly it was fifteen years ago. And for all I know may still be among the ranks of Anglican clergy. But I would have thought that the fashion now was rather to scorn those who belittle the liberal spirit or the liberal achievement. Indeed, his plea for a Christian agnosticism is one that would surely be echoed in most circles of lively Christian thinking.

There may, however, be a concealed problem just at this point. The concluding chapter not only demands a true agnosticism but also defends that view of Christian ethics that deals in terms of spirit and motive, and the application of the dynamic of love to the practical ever-changing situation. Here also we applaud. Yet we must not ignore the perils. The shrewdest comment on the work of John Oman was made by the reviewer who pointed out that this was magnificent because and in so far as it assumed the foundation of the Westminster Confession. Just so! The dangerous liberalism was that which lost the sure foundation that kept it true and made it fruitful. The liberalism we decry today is that which is immersed in outdated science and outmoded philosophy. Needless to say, Dr. Barry is not of that era.

Many would agree that whatever else the minister of the future may be he must at least remain pastor. It was but a few years ago that an Anglo-Catholic of the school of Mascall startled his brethren with a book on Pastoral Theology that undeniably broke new ground. Other allied studies followed. Now the pastoral theme is given fresh examination in a series of essays[6] which range from the particular to the general but never lose touch with the concrete situation of the Church of England in twentieth-century Britain. This volume may be read in isolation without any encounter with

[6] *Essays in Pastoral Reconstruction,* by M. Thornton. (S.P.C.K., 17/6d.). 1960.

insuperable difficulties. But it will perhaps yield up the fulness of its treasure only to those who have read the author's earlier book.

I have more than once made reference to our modern need for an adequate and contemporary pastoral theology. These tantalising studies contribute some more of the material that must necessarily be taken into account. Certainly their concern is the promotion of a characteristically Anglican spirituality. Nevertheless, Free Churchmen would do well to sit up and take notice; for there are things being said here which may well be more urgently relevant to their particular problems than at first appears. They should ponder long Mr. Thornton's concept of the Remnant—but not be too eager to equate it without remainder with the saints of the gathered church. They should weigh with care the place he would give to the use of the Daily Office—and not too quickly assume that there can be no possibility of a Free Church counterpart. They should come to terms with his interpretation and defence of ascetical theology—and then go on to do some hard thinking about casuistry and church meetings.

This is a book to be taken seriously, but not too soberly. It is not the systematic presentation of the theologian but the manifesto of the prophet. And the prophet notoriously has to be rubbed off at the edges. Mr. Thornton is not at his most convincing on organs and clinical baptism; and his background fetters him when he comes to grapple with sermons. But he deals with the laity in the only way in which they should be dealt with—and so seldom are—namely, realistically. He punctures the swollen pietistic illusions that surround prayer meetings, conventional Scripture reading, internal organizations, church magazines, mass efforts, indiscriminate visitation. And he recalls us to that spiritual direction that should always be written deep into ministerial endeavour and provide the holy counterpoint to the sacred melody of the Liturgy of the People of God.

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