

SOME RECENT NEW TESTAMENT WORK

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THIS survey will consider introductory works, and then apologetic and finally theological and devotional studies.

Let us start with Professor Alfred Wikenhauser's *New Testament Introduction*.¹ The publishers are to be congratulated on this production which now becomes the best recent manual in English. The translation is made from the second, revised and enlarged German edition; and the bibliography is brought up to date by the author himself up to the spring of 1957. Thus it is good to see an adequate note on Papyrus Bodmer II and references to the principle articles thereon. Among other good points we could single out the admirable summary on form-criticism. There is a wealth of information concisely set out. Altogether a fine example of sound Catholic scholarship is now made available to a much wider public of theological students and educated layfolk.

For seemingly the same sort of public, but this time non-Catholic, and in a very different style is a new work on the Gospels by Professor Frederick Grant.² Here we have the work of a well-known scholar and life-long lover of the Gospels: yet we cannot avoid the impression that this work is redolent of past rather than present and future trends of New Testament study. True, there are wise lessons. Nothing can replace method and hard personal work in the reading and close comparison of gospel with gospel. Yet we would hesitate to urge, as our author does (pp. 41-50) the marking of our texts (even in red and blue!), as if that was the only way to enter profoundly into synoptic and other problems. Equally effective and less expensive in texts is the close scrutiny of synopsis and concordances, and especially *making one's own synopsis and comparisons*. The repeated stress on the Church (pp. 11-21, 72, etc.) as background and in the formation of the gospels represents a more welcome trait. It remains for our separated brethren to realize that the Church as well as was, *is* and always will be, the context and necessary background for any true grasp of the Gospels. Our author had not seen J. P. Audet's *Didache* at the time of writing, and has little on the Judaeen desert scrolls and background studies, and archaeology generally. For this reason no doubt he speaks of St John as 'the gospel of the Hellenists', thus seemingly prejudging a difficult question and by-passing the semitic traits and especially the uncanny first-hand knowledge of Palestine shown by the author of this spiritual gospel.

1 *New Testament Introduction*, by Alfred Wikenhauser. (Herder and Herder, New York; Nelson, London and Edinburgh, 50s.)

2 *The Gospels: Origin and Growth*, by Frederick C. Grant. (Faber and Faber, 21s.)

Also relevant to New Testament introduction is a new translation of Josephus's *Jewish War*.³ Most students hitherto have had to be content with Whiston's classic version. Now we have something eminently new and readable, and a modern presentation of Josephus's work with an editorial liberty which is certainly acceptable. '... I have removed from their original position many passages of varying length which interrupt the narrative and destroy the connection of thought. Nine longer passages appear as *excursus* at the end; and smaller sections become footnotes.' If this is considered high-handed editing, let us remember that after all we can lawfully avail ourselves of typographical facilities which were unknown to the ancient world. The Introduction is admirable, showing effectively the importance of the *Jewish War* for our knowledge of the New Testament period, and incidentally making havoc of a favourite device of much modern scholarship, namely the *vaticinium ex eventu*. A table at the end enables us to correlate the present translator's twenty-three chapters with the many more divisions of Whiston's edition.

Time marches on, and what has been called 'The Bultmannian epoch in German theology' is no doubt verging into various post-bultmannian derivatives. A competent Catholic theologian who has carefully pondered the relations of human language to divine realities, would surely read, or try to read, Bultmann with sustained interest and serene disagreement, knowing well that St Thomas is no more a 'victim of the three-decker universe' than is Bultmann himself, who appears to be one of many who know nothing of Catholic theology, and fail to appreciate how sound speculative theology goes in the direction of purifying our concepts rather than expounding and expanding 'mythological' elements. Still, there is room for apologetics: Bultmann must be answered. This has been done, trenchantly and effectively by Fr L. Malevez.⁴ 'Our aim is to interpret the thought of the Protestant theologian Rudolph Bultmann' (p. 11). Fr Malevez does not minimize the difficulty of understanding; he fully realizes, as does Karl Barth, that at best it is always 'an attempt to understand him', and he speaks humbly of 'the books which we are trying to expound' (p. 17 note). The resultant analysis of some of the main lines of Bultmann's thought makes the whole work of Fr Malevez an admirable introduction to the theology of Bultmann; and thus the sub-title of the book is very accurate. The main portion of the book appears in the careful and understanding translation of Dr Olive Wyon. Two supplementary essays take stock of some important publications after 1954, and are translated by Bernard Noble. But, besides an

3 Josephus, *The Jewish War*. Translated with an introduction by G. A. Williamson. (Penguin Books, 5s.)

4 L. Malevez, *The Christian Message and Myth*. (S.C.M. Press, 25s.)

exposition of Bultmann's thought, we are presented with a model of what apologetic work should be. First, there is a sincere and strenuous attempt to grasp the thought of Bultmann and to represent it scrupulously fairly. Our author then focuses on this resultant body of doctrine what we might term the strong light of 'the verdict of tradition'. Without appeal to authority, vigorously reasoned, the outcome of this essay would seem to be, and has seemed to more than one reader, a complete demolition of Bultmann. Those who embark on this book (which is not light reading) will be amply rewarded by an intellectual treat, and will gauge for themselves how it is an outstanding contribution to the Library of Philosophy and Theology.

An analytic survey, of a type which seems to be popular in this country, of post-war German protestant theology is furnished by *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*.⁵ We are always tempted to think that the copious exegesis of German scholars' work inevitably leaves less time for and distracts from the essential exegesis of the Holy Texts. 'The Historical Jesus' reminds us of very old attitudes, and we are left wondering whether the new quest might not be as illusory as others. It is piquant to see Harald Riesenfeld severely taken to task (p. 64, note 1) precisely for his lecture at the Four Gospels Congress at Oxford (September 1957). This same lecture was, at the time, very generally appreciated and enthusiastically acclaimed. Two years seems a short time for such a volte-face in scholarly appraisal.

Turning now to doctrinal and devotional writings, let us first consider the work of biblical theology of Professor Lucien Cerfaux, now presented to us in English dress as *Christ in the Theology of Saint Paul*.⁶ The original (*Lectio Divina* series, no. 6, 1951: 2nd Ed, 1954) no doubt represents that type of good work which can, e.g. in France or Belgium, be put across as *haute vulgarisation* whereas in fact it is thoroughly scholarly writing at a definitely senior level. To work through the various exegetical renderings proposed to us in this book—and they all deserve attention—and to make a close study of this work in all its parts would of itself be an education in the thought of St Paul. And an education of this sort is surely one of the *desiderata* of every reflecting Christian. The translation too often makes us seek the original, as in the translation of the title which heads the first of this work's three main sections. Thus, *Le Christ 'acteur' du Salut* is certainly *not* 'Christ the Saviour', for this last bypasses a nuance in the very special French, and, more seriously, completely fails to represent the New Testament Greek which underlies that French. A real problem about this important book is its cost. The production, format, etc.,

⁵ James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*. (S.C.M. Press, 9s. 6d.)

⁶ L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St Paul*. (Herder and Herder, New York; Nelson, Edinburgh and London, 1959, 50s.)

are excellent, though typographically rather spread out. We get the impression that the book is designed for the U.S.A. book market. We need simpler and cheaper production of good books in England. Very few students can afford 50s. for a book which they should read; and they are bound to notice that they can get the French text for 14s. 6d.

On a much lowlier level is the splendid introduction to the thought of St Paul offered to us by Dr William Grossouw of the University of Nijmegen.⁷ The author was impelled to produce this model of concision and 'first steps in St Paul' simply because of the non-existence of anything like it in Dutch Catholic literature. There is a similar poverty in this country, and so we welcome this translation. Five chapters furnish the essentials of St Paul's teaching: Existence without Christ; Redemption in Christ; Conversion to Christ; Existence in Christ; The Body of Christ. The notes explain difficult words or technical terms; and there is an index. Dr Grossouw is a scholar who is writing with apostolic zeal for the man in the street, very simply without in the least bit talking down to him.

In a parallel, though rather older volume,⁸ our author protests that he is not writing 'an introduction to the Fourth Gospel in the ordinary sense of the word'. He certainly has done better and succeeded in leading us 'into the Sanctum of St John's thoughts'. That this can be done in 130 pages may be queried by the very learned. But all and sundry are invited to read for themselves and see how it *can* be done, with the enthusiasm and the qualities of a Dr Grossouw. Certainly it is a little book which will make its readers love St John yet more, and induce them to turn to the Gospel itself.

Meditations on St John's gospel will continue till the end of the world, and the *Meditations on the Gospel of St John*⁹ before us are an example of sentence-by-sentence reflexions, this time from 1.19-5.47. An earlier volume of Adrienne von Speyr, *The Word*, published in 1953, consisted of like reflexions on 1.1-18, or the Prologue proper. These are mature meditations, we almost said virile. The thought of St John is often elaborated by other strands in that same thought. For such is the texture of the gospel that each verse can so often conjure up other verses or parts of the close-woven text. And all the while we sense that we are reading the work of one who has long pondered the text of St John as of all Scripture.

'Our message concerns the Word who is life; what he was from the first, what we have heard about him; what it was that met our gaze,

7 Dr William Grossouw, *In Christ*. Translated by M. W. Schoenberg, o.s.c. (Geoffrey Chapman, 8s. 6d.)

8 Dr William Grossouw, *Revelation and Redemption*. Translated and edited by M. W. Schoenberg, o.s.c. (Geoffrey Chapman, 8s. 6d.)

9 Adrienne von Speyr, *Meditations on the Gospel of St John*. (Collins, 16s.)

and the touch of our hands. Yes, life dawned, and it is as eye-witnesses that we give you news of that life, that eternal life, which ever abode with the Father and has dawned, now, on us' (I John I, 1). This text furnishes the key-note of this new book on the spiritual gospel.¹⁰ Our author enlarges upon the witness of the beloved disciple to his Lord and Master. Père Paul-Marie de la Croix was well prepared for the writing of this new meditative work in that he had for some years steeped himself in the Scriptures and then written the profoundly meditative work *L'Ancien Testament Source de Vie Spirituelle*. Where scholars go various ways, and speak of 'the Hellenists's gospel', or are accused of having made St John go to Balliol, or alternatively opt for an aramaic version of the gospel, it is refreshing to read of a living and loving man's spiritual formation, how he was a disciple of the Precursor, and then of Christ, and then a child of the Mother of Jesus, the man of the spirit, contemplative and apostle; and finally how he was loved by Jesus and wrote a living gospel about Jesus. We then pass from a spiritual man's formation to the structure and characteristics of the spiritual gospel. Incidentally, classic theology would not allow (p. 58) that inspired authors, *qua* inspired habitually have the indwelling Holy Spirit. From St Thomas's teaching we learn that inspiration is a transient grace. Of course in St John, and in many other biblical writers, it was a transient grace in one who as man of God was rooted and founded in habitual grace.

The following chapters are reflections on the Prologue and Word of Truth and the Word made flesh. Then comes the portrait of Christ, the life of Christ, the Christ who is Light and revealer of his Heavenly Father. We are then conducted through the themes of the Holy Ghost or Paraclete, of Water and the Spirit, of Faith (—this last an admirable essay on 'faith in St John'), the Call of God and Human Response, Christ and Faith, Passover, Sacrifice, Abiding in Christ. Then come reflections on the Passion and the Mother of the Saviour (from whom the evangelist no doubt learned so much). The Resurrection is meditated in terms of the effective outpouring of the Holy Ghost who is life-giving and soul of our souls. Finally we have the Spirit and the Bride, wherein 'the privileged witness of Christ' speaks sublimely of Christ living on in his Church.

¹⁰ Paul-Marie de la Croix, O.C.D., *L'Évangile de Jean et son témoignage spirituel*. (Desclée de Brouwer, 195 Belgian francs.)