

READING REPORTS

by

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Course: New Testament Theology I: The Theology of Jesus

and of the Primitive Church

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*Very good
DMZ*

Barrett, C. K. The New Testament Background: Selected Documents. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961.

pp. 118-122. Herod the Great as seen through excerpts from Josephus, War.

Josephus shows how the Idumean dynasty was established by the cunning of Antipater. He praises highly Herod the Great for freeing the land of brigands, for building the temple, for the creation of cities, and for his physical constitution. Herod, however, was plagued with marital difficulties.

pp. 123-4. The Procurators--Josephus, War.

Josephus points out how the reign of Archelaus came to an end and Judea was turned over to procurators. He tells how Pilate incurred the wrath of the Jews by introducing Roman standards to Jerusalem and was forced to take them back.

pp. 124-7. Pharisees, ^aSaducees and Essenes--Josephus, War.

Josephus seems to give a very accurate description of the Essenes' way of life.

pp. 127-133. The Jewish War of A. D. 66-70. Josephus, War.

Josephus gives two fundamental reasons for the revolt (1) Jewish extremism, (2) the ineptitude of Roman administrators. Lastly he describes the crushing final assault on Jerusalem, with the accompanying scenes of famine, bloodshed, and desolation.

pp. 189-207. Excerpt from The Jewish War, The Antiquities of the Jews, The Life, and Against Apion, that have a bearing on Josephus' life.

One gathers from these excerpts that Josephus was not too humble and prided himself on his ancestry and precocity. He also seems to be play-it safe with both the Jews and the Romans. To a great extent he succeeded in convincing the Romans and also his countrymen. He gives a very brilliant defense of his religion in excerpts from Against Apion.

I Maccabees (R. S. V.), chapters 1 to 9.

The first and second chapters of these nine are really the most enlightening from the point of view of the historian. The first gives the cultural, economic, and religious reasons for the Maccabean revolt. It was brought about by the attempt of Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, the sinful roct, to destroy Jewish religion through hellenization. He desecrated the temple, profaned the sabbath, built altars to pagan idols, destroyed the law and exploited the land through tribute and plundering.

This brought about the resistance of many pious Jews. Mattathias, a priest and head of a family of five sons, undertook to resist the designs of the king in order to save Judaism and the observance of the law. When he died, the responsibility passed to his sons.

The rest of these chapters deal with the fortunes of the war between the Maccabees and Antiochus IV and his successors. Everything revolves around war, and there is hardly anything of cultural and social significance apart from war. An event fraught with tremendous future consequences was the alliance of Jud^{ea} with Rome. The Maccabees are greatly glorified by the author for their exploits.

The Wisdom of Solomon, chapters 1-10.

The big theme in these chapters is the exaltation of righteousness and wisdom and the condemnation of unrighteousness and those that follow it.

The wicked are described in Epicurean terms but their wickedness is active rather than easygoing. The end of the ungodly is destruction.

Those that follow righteousness, however, are in the hands of God and will share in immortality. Virtue is immortal. Virtue is more to be desired than many years.

The highest of gifts is wisdom. It is described as radiant and un-failing. The author personalizes the concept and finds its source in God. Wisdom was in the beginning with God, was the fashioner of all that exists, produces virtue, has foreknowledge.

The author has a universal approach to the problem of wisdom. It can be attained by the rulers of the earth. The literary style is lofty, as fits the loftiness of the subject. To ^{the author} him the righteous is the wise man and viceversa, the wise man is the righteous man. Wisdom is the greatest gift because it brings fellowship with God.

This is a beautiful wisdom-literary creation. Undoubtedly the concept of the logos in John finds one of its sources in this exaltation of wisdom.

Dodd, C. H. The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments. 9th ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960. 96 pp.

The theme of this book is the apostolic kerygma as distinct from apostolic didache. The author analyses the development of apostolic preaching from its earliest manifestation to its latest developments. He sees as the basic elements in the kerygma (1) that the prophecies are fulfilled and the new age has been inaugurated in the coming of Christ; (2) that Christ, born of the seed of David, was approved of God by mighty acts and miracles; (3) that He died according to the Scriptures to deliver us out of the present evil age; (4) that He was buried; (5) that He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures; (6) that He sits exalted at the right of God, as Son of God and Lord of the quick and the dead; (7) that He will come again as judge and Saviour of men; (8) that He has sent the Holy Spirit as was prophesied; (9) a call to repentance.

The reader is impressed by the following important features of this book:

1. The important role that eschatology plays in the kerygma.
2. How the delaying of the second coming shifted the emphasis from the future to the present and produced such changes in the kerygma as are evidenced in Paul and John.
3. The unity of the New Testament witness to the basic facts of the kerygma, although from different perspectives.
4. The avenues of research that this approach to the New Testament opens up.

^{S.}
Gilmour, X. MacLean. The Gospel Jesus Preached. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957. pp. 86-97.

In this chapter the author traces briefly the meaning of the concept of the Kingdom of God for prophets of the Old Testament and for the apocalyptists of the centuries prior and up to the time of Jesus. The purpose is to provide the background against which one can understand the concept as Jesus used it. The author points out that Jesus used the term in a double projection. On the one hand, Jesus, like the apocalyptists, thought that the Kingdom of God was coming soon, suddenly and catastrophically. On the other hand, he believed that the Kingdom of God was coming into effective operation already in his lifetime.

This approach is a synthesis in tension between the prophetic and apocalyptic views of the rule of God. To us it seems a fruitful line of approach.

Pfeiffer Robert H., "The Literature and Religion of the Apocrypha," Interpreter's Bible, Vol. I. Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952. pp. 391-419.

This is a long and detailed article about the Apocrypha. The author first considers the Apocrypha in Judaism and Christianity, both before and after the Reformation, and then proceeds to give a brief analysis of the content of each book, pointing out the leading ideas, the religious value of the book.

The reader is impressed by the variety of the literature: wisdom, historical, apocalyptic, didactic romance. The personification of the concept of wisdom is particularly impressive.

Kümmel, W. G. Promise and Fulfilment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus.
London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1957. 168 pp.

Kümmel undertakes in this book a historico-theological exegesis of the eschatological message of Jesus. He comes to the conclusion that indeed Jesus expected the imminent coming of the Kingdom but confessed that he did not know the date. Jesus, however, does not go into details about the coming of the Kingdom, as was the custom of apocalyptic writers, but speaks in the most general terms. Alongside this eschatological expectation, Kümmel finds that Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom is already present in his person and deeds. This juxtaposition of the Kingdom as imminent futurity and present actuality is not, according to Kümmel, a mere historical accident, but is part and parcel of Jesus' eschatology. Furthermore, neither the tension nor the concepts can be set aside in the interest of accommodation or modernity, for then we would be throwing away the very core of the New Testament revelation.

With this thesis on hand, Kümmel affirms that neither Dodd,^{von} Bultmann,¹ nor Wilder do justice to the historical testimony of the New Testament. Dodd's concept of realized eschatology is untenable on the basis of historical exegesis. Bultmann and Wilder, Kümmel ^{indicts} as abrogating the central New Testament message of God as acting at a definite moment in history in a final redemptive act--the mythological form of which cannot simply be detached--by putting forth respectively a timeless message concerning the present as the time of decision and the spiritual nearness of God.

The only thing I can say at this time concerning this book is that it presents to my way of thinking the most challenging interpretation of Jesus' eschatology that I have met. There is sound exegesis and boldness of approach.

Niebuhr, Richard R. Resurrection and Historical Reason: A Study of Theological Method. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957. 184 pp.

Niebuhr asserts in this book that the resurrection event is central to the New Testament faith. It is the perspective from which all else is looked at. However, since the nineteenth century, theologians have, by and large, had trouble accepting this order of thought. This has been due to the fact that the theologians have been applying to the historical narratives of the New Testament categories of thought taken over from natural science and scientific historical criticism. In order to deal with the resurrection, theologians have resorted to schemes of thought that deny the historical genuineness of the resurrection, calling it a supra-historical event or Heilsgeschichte.

Niebuhr points out, however, that the concept of nature utilized by natural science is highly abstract and never deals with all the irrationality and givenness of the world or history. He contends that natural laws always deal with the regular and familiar but not with the strange, the irrational and spontaneous and contingent and given. Yet the categories of irrationality, givenness, and contingency are the categories that we find in history. These are the categories that postulate and give meaning to love, grace and a God with a personal will. He therefore advocates the treatment of the resurrection event in all the givenness and individuality of all historical events and not as a link in the chain of causality.

This treatment of the problem of historical method seems to me a very promising one. It challenges one of the basic presuppositions of historical criticism (which it received from natural science), and offers a new line of approach to historical and theological research.

Schweitzer, Albert. The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957. 174 pp.

In this book Schweitzer attempts to reconstruct the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Mark. He bases his presentation on what he thinks is the pattern revealed in the Gospel itself--namely the thoroughly eschatological conception that Jesus had of himself as the coming Messiah in the coming Kingdom. To the people Jesus was Elijah--the forerunner that was to come before the Messiah. However, Jesus knew from his baptism that he was the Messiah but kept it a secret until he revealed it to three of his disciples in the Transfiguration. A little later the secret is given to the disciples through Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi. Schweitzer reverses the order of these events as they appear in Mark. The secret, however, was kept among the twelve until Judas betrayed it to the High Priest. It was upon the charge that He claimed to be the Messiah, a blasphemy to be sure, that He was condemned.

Schweitzer sees the person and message of Jesus entirely ^{within} through an eschatological framework. In the first part of his ministry Jesus expected the coming of the kingdom within months, even before the disciples had finished their missionary tour. However, when this failed to materialize, He came to the conclusion that He had to go up to Jerusalem to die, all according to the will of God. But his death, to be followed immediately by the resurrection, was to be the final event that would usher in the Kingdom of God--and then He would be the glorious Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to reign with his own.

The ethics of Jesus are interim ethics, that is, they are supposed to govern the conduct of his followers until the coming of the Kingdom, which event was not too far away. Obedience to this ethic would help to usher in the Kingdom. The signs and wonders, especially the casting out of demons,

are an attestation that the power of ungodliness is coming to an end. The event of the feeding of the crowd Schweitzer interprets as a cultic meal by the seashore, the ¹first Lord's Supper, foreshadowing the Messianic banquet when the Kingdom comes. The Last Supper is to be seen in the same light.

Schweitzer's ²reconstruction is directed against what he calls the modern-historical solution to the synoptic presentation of Jesus and his message. Through his arguments he demolishes the four basic tenets of the modern position. He maintains, firstly, that it is historically untenable to hold ^{was} a fortunate Galilean period followed by a time of defeat; it was the other way around; secondly, that it cannot be proved that the passion sayings were influenced by Paul, and therefore they ^{must} come from Jesus; thirdly, that it is the notion of the hyper-ethical, the eschatological, rather than the merely ethical, with the Kingdom of God already present, which dominates the passion; fourthly, that the passion idea is not an ethical reflection, but a ~~secret~~ which needed not to be understood.

Thus Schweitzer assails the liberal position which interpreted the synoptic presentation of Jesus and his message in terms of ethical teachings and the kingdom of God as already present in his lifetime. Instead he advances the thesis that Jesus' message is thoroughly eschatological. The Kingdom of God was for him a future coming event, and the ethics of service and humility have only relevance in the light of the imminent expectation of the Kingdom.

There is much to be said for Schweitzer's reconstruction. For one thing, it is a cogent and coherent approach to the ²Marcen witness to Jesus. Schweitzer has found in the eschatological outlook a key that

opens up the meaning of the fospel story. However, it is this very cogency and coherence that poses many questions to the mind of those interested in the life of Jesus. Does Schweitzer do justice to the Markan document as it stands? He does not take into consideration the theology of the primitive church as it is reflected in Mark. He criticises the liberal school for psychologising the life of Jesus. But is not Schweitzer guilty of the same mistake when he sees a gradual understanding in the mind of Jesus of his messianic role as a suffering servant, even though it be within the framework of the eschatological category? Can the ethics of Jesus be lumped together as completely eschatological? These are some of the questions that come to our mind.

However, having said this, we have to add that there is no question in our mind that Schweitzer has brought to our attention one of the basic ingredients of the New Testament Weltanschauung. The eschatological category is fundamental to the understanding of Jesus. In this he is right and the liberals are wrong. It cannot be thrown out as husk. It is part of the kernel. The eschatological content of the gospel throws before our very eyes the strangeness and remoteness of Jesus' ways of thinking and conceiving of ultimate realities in comparison to our modern Weltanschauung.

Windisch, Hans. The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. Philadelphia:
The Westminster Press, 1951. 224 pp. Trans. S. M. Gilmour.

This book has only four chapters, each one dealing with a major problem in respect to the Sermon on the Mount, its historical meaning and interpretation.

The first chapter deals with the eschatological framework of the Sermon on the Mount. Windisch accepts the general validity of the works of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer which point out the eschatological nature of the message of Jesus. He finds that the Sermon on the Mount is set structurally by Matthew in an eschatological framework, that is, the materials are arranged in such a way as to bring out the eschatological element. By the eschatological element is meant that the teachings are given under the expectation that the Kingdom of God is to come in the near future. Ethical renewal is therefore demanded prior to the end as a condition of entrance into the Kingdom. However, Matthew has inserted material into the Sermon that originally was not conditioned by the eschatological expectation. The author spends the greatest part of the chapter pointing out the materials which are eschatological and the individual logia that originally were not.

In chapter two the author raises the question as to the meaning of the commandments. Are they to be taken literally? Do they illustrate a disposition of the mind and of the will, without the specific injunction demanding obedience? Are they so impracticable that their purpose is to convict us of sin and to throw us on the mercy of God? These last two questions illustrate positions taken by Protestant theologians.

Windisch asserts categorically that a serious historical exegesis

of the Sermon on the Mount makes only one conclusion possible; namely, that the commandments are to be taken literally and that Jesus expected obedience to them. And this is true not only because of the eschatological expectation, but also because the sermon shares the presupposition of practicality with the Torah and with ^{ch}Hokmah (wisdom). Jesus is a new Lawgiver, and assumes that this new law is to be obeyed simply because it is the will of God. This is radical obedience. All human considerations and contingencies do not appear in the picture.

In chapter three the author considers Jesus' attitude to Judaism in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon as it stands has to be placed wholly within the Israelitish Jewish religious tradition, that is, Jesus built upon the Torah, the Prophets, and Wisdom. However, Jesus took over the ethicoreligious content of the tradition and left behind the ceremonial Torah. He also singled out individual laws and declared them primary, while others he considered inferior. And finally he left the national and racial conflicts behind. All these factors brought Jesus into conflict with Rabbinic Judaism that stuck to the untouchability of the tradition simply because it was God's revelation. Thus Windisch finds much that is Jewish in the Sermon, but on the whole it is anti-Jewish.

In chapter four the question of theological exegesis is taken up. Up to this point the author has tried to bring out what he thinks is the meaning of the Sermon on the basis of historical exegesis. He is careful to point out that no theological interpretation can be done until the historical exegete has done his work. Theologically, ^chy sees the Sermon as pre-Christian and pre-Pauline, that is, there is in it no doctrine of the cross nor of forgiveness of sins through atonement. However, he can see that God is present in it as our Father, as Goodness, as forgiving.

Jesus, however, is not on the same level of the Father but is the new lawgiver, prophet, future world judge, and Lord of the new religious community.

There are several aspects of this book that deserve the attention of all New Testament students. For one thing, it cannot be said too loudly that historical exegesis precedes theological interpretation. Thus Windisch is right in criticizing Herrmann, Dibelius, Bultmann, Kittel, Stange, and others for seeing the Sermon on the Mount through the spectacles of their own theological and philosophical presuppositions, be they liberal, orthodox, existential, or what-not. If they do that, it is only fair that they should distinguish between the original meaning and their own interpretation.

Also after a historical exegesis of this kind, no one is entitled to laugh or scoff at those groups or individuals who in all earnestness endeavour to follow literally the injunctions of Jesus.

Finally, this book ought to be read carefully and studiously with the Sermon on the Mount before them by students of the New Testament. The issues considered are of such importance as to deserve serious study. There are many areas that are touched upon that could provide avenues for further research.