

THE INFANCY NARRATIVES. Pp. 145. THE PASSION NARRATIVES. Pp. 192. THE RESURRECTION NARRATIVES. Pp. 150. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. Pp 210. Studies in the Synoptic Gospels by Herman Hendrickx. Geoffrey Chapman. London.

These volumes (hereinafter indicated by their initials) have their origin in lectures given (and originally published) in Manila by a Louvain-trained theologian now teaching there. This shows through in places; the material could have done with more pulling together before its appearance in book form. The inclusion of a thread of attributed quotations (though in general very aptly selected) is also reminiscent of the lecture room, and the asides are a reminder (sometimes very salutary) that they were originally delivered in the third world. The absence of detailed justification for the positions taken (apart from the bibliography, of which more below) is a further indication both of the original audience and of that which publication in this country aims to reach. *Vulgarisation*, rather than scholarly debate, is the intention.

The method adopted will be relatively unfamiliar. Instead of continuous commentary on a single gospel it takes certain key areas common to two, or three, evangelists and examines them synoptically. This is very successful with the passion and resurrection narratives where the three synoptics move together over the same ground and it is possible to switch back and forth between them. That it works as well as it does with the infancy narratives may suggest to some that they are less totally independent of one another, at least structurally, than Hendrickx, following the majority, thinks. But it is not really applicable to the Sermon on the Mount, where the differences in length, content and order between Matthew and Luke are so extensive, except on unprovable assumptions about an original dominical sermon. Matthew's sermon is integral to his whole gospel and can be properly understood only in the light of that; to remove it from that context in order to concentrate on the Lucan parallels is like tying one of the commentator's hands behind his back, and perhaps explains why in places he gives the impression of passing from source analysis to liberation theology without very much in between.

So much for the methods; what of the results?

Do they break new ground? No, nor were they meant to. They include nevertheless the results of some very interesting recent work, notably on Luke 2 and bibliographies that the specialist will be grateful for. (The non-specialist could have done with some help, though, in sorting out which titles are works of fundamental scholarship and which are *vulgarisation*. And why are no commentaries included, despite the author's own indebtedness to them which can amount in places to *verbatim* borrowing?). I missed in 1 any reference to G. Vermes' accounts of *midrash* (more accessible than those listed here) or to M.D. Goulder and M.L. Sanderson's JTS article of 1957 ('St Luke's Genesis'); in S. to C.F. Evans' fine study of the Lord's Prayer; and in R. to the debate between G.W.H. Lampe and D.M. Mackinnon published as *Resurrection* (1967).

Are they reliable? In general, certainly. I found the author over-confident in a few places: e.g. that the gospel passion narrative took shape through recitation in the context of the Church's eucharist; that Jesus' references to the 'poor' unquestionably meant the economically deprived; that the tradition of an empty tomb in Jerusalem is universally agreed to be early (he cannot have met the theory that there was no tomb at all, only the customary common grave of executed common criminals); or that the last word has been said (by B.J. Hubbard in 1974) on the authenticity of the baptismal 'triad' in Mt 28. 19. Very occasionally speculation is allowed to get the better of his normally rigorous critical stance, as in his presumption of a connection between Mary and the *anawim* circles (does he mean in fact, or in Luke's account of her, and where in either case is the evidence for the survival of these groups into the beginning of our era?). And, exceptionally, he lets himself get trapped into defending the indefensible, as in Mt 27.53, where he tries, on the basis of texts from Hebrews and Revelation, to make the 'holy city' into which the resurrected dead go

Is there any feature that makes their publication particularly timely and worthwhile? The most valuable features, for my money, are the concluding sections in I. and R. on preaching and the equivalent one on theological and pastoral perspectives, ending with a note on preaching, in P. These are strikingly successful in drawing together the results of the foregoing examination of the texts and presenting them in a way which is coherent, bracing and in the true sense evangelical. (The lack of anything to correspond in S., where the final section on the practicability of the Sermon, though fair as far as it goes, is not an adequate substitute, is one reason why in that volume the preaching has tended to spill over into the exegesis).

I. insists that 'the infancy narratives can be correctly understood only if we read them as composed after, and in the light of, the resurrection experience', and that this means that they 'do not add anything really new to the gospel message proper'. Hendrickx is therefore ruthless with embellishments which the devotional tradition of Christianity from the apocryphal gospels onwards has superimposed on the gospel story, and which continue to dominate even the secular presentation of Christmas; a sermon must not 'look like a Nativity play, but rather what it should always be, a proclamation of Jesus as the Lord and Saviour'.

R. warns similarly against concentrating on secondary features of the stories, angels at the tomb or sentimental reflections on the journey to Emmaus, and so on. It also emphasizes the ambiguity of the part played in the narratives by the discovery of the empty tomb, and the absence of any use of it to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection. 'There is no basis in the New Testament', the author says, 'for saying that the apostles proclaimed the empty tomb. It is never mentioned in their preaching. They proclaim not the empty tomb but the risen Christ'. Behind this statement lie two pages in the exegetical section (R., pp. 15–16) which should be required reading for Easter preachers of all traditions. Those who have fully digested them should be proof against intimidation by one-sided and alarmist second-hand reports of the views of radical theologians and radical bishops.

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GOD IN FRAGMENTS, by Jacques Pohier, trans. by John Bowden. *SCM Press*, London 1985. £9.50 paper.

This is a translation of the remarkable book by the French Dominican Jacques Pohier, *Dieu Fractures*, published in French in 1985 and reviewed in *New Blackfriars* by Fergus Kerr OP in the article 'Pohier's Apologia, NB Vol 66 No 779 (May 1985) pp. 216–224.

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