



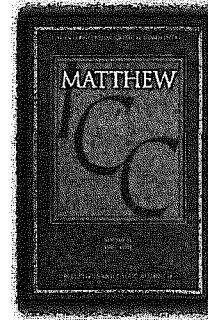
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BOOK REVIEWS



*A CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL
COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF
SAINT MATTHEW*

W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison
International Critical Commentary,
Edinburgh:

T. & T. Clark (1988-97)

Volume 1: (Not yet available)

Volume 2: 808 pages, cloth, \$75.00,

Volume 3: 789 pages, cloth, \$75.00

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Leon Morris

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1992)

798 pages, cloth, \$47.00

*T*he new edition of *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (ICC) quite evidently has set for itself a very high standard. The first installment was C. E. B. Cranfield's magisterial volumes on Romans, and now we have the three volumes on Matthew by the capable team of the late New Testament scholar, W. D. Davies, and his protégé, Dale C. Allison. Inasmuch as this renewed version of the ICC seeks to continue the tradition of meticulous philological and historical research set by its predecessor, the commentary of Davies/Allison is certainly no disappointment.

For the user of the commentary, the most important consideration is the methodological-hermeneutical approach of its authors. One of the phenomena of modern biblical study has been the trend to dismiss the factor of context and concentrate on "the text in itself." For the practitioners of such disciplines as the "new hermeneutic," "structuralism," and the various brands of "post-structuralism," the historical

study of the Bible has been assigned only a preliminary role in interpretation, the primary assumption being that any author (biblical or otherwise) creates a literary world of his own, an art for art's sake, upon which extraneous factors must not be allowed to obtrude. The result has been that traditional introductory matters such as date, authorship, readers, as well as the consultation of parallel literature falling within the milieu of the document in question, have been replaced by a concentration on the "deep structures" of a writing, i.e., the underlying features which form the basis of all narratives: the functions, motives and interactions of the main characters (and objects), and—most notably—the types of oppositions and their resolutions which develop as the text unfolds. In short, the thrust of the literary critical method is its disavowal of an "intended meaning" of an author within a historical/cultural context, an intention which addresses issues contemporary with the author.

It is against such a hermeneutic that Davies/Allison react. In their words, "We cannot gather grapes from briars nor figs from thistles: our expectation of the fruit to be harvested depends on the nature of the plant" (1.2). This being the case, what can we expect Matthew to yield? And the answer to the question, for the authors, does indeed depend on an assessment of the kind of document (genre) the First Gospel actually is, an assessment contingent on the necessity of historical research. For this reason, the commentary follows the "historical-critical" method. Although negative connotations are frequently attached to this phrase, it means only the procedure of interpreting each New Testament book in light of its first-century Palestinian or Hellenistic context in order to uncover its intended sense (see 1.3-4).

Perhaps a more fundamental reason for the concentration on the historical-critical method, they say, is that Matthew assumes that standing behind his Gospel is an actual person, the historical Jesus of Nazareth. As the other Gospels, Matthew is not art for art's sake. Indeed, the aim of the Gospels is not primarily literary at all, which is why they do not fall into any ready-made genre of ancient literature: "rather do they intend

to point to the manifold significance of Jesus of Nazareth for the communities within which they wrote and for humankind and his *mysterium tremendum*" (1.4-5).

In view of such considerations, the authors clarify that their task is to uncover the "plain sense" of Matthew's text. As they explain, this is not the "literal" or "original" sense, which varies in different parts of the Gospel. It is, rather, the sense which the sentences, paragraphs, and the longer unity, the structure, shape and flow of the Gospel as a totality present (see 1.5).

At this juncture, an important methodological factor of the commentary is introduced, viz., the citation of extra-biblical parallels to Matthew. By way of justification of the procedure, three comments are offered. One is that the Evangelist, like his readers, did not live in an "extra-textual" world; and in as far as possible, his Gospel should not be isolated from his world, "lest we, inhabitants of another place and a very different time, lose too much understanding of Matthew's meaning." "Context defines meaning; and if our gospel text is the foreground, then it cannot be placed in perspective without its background" (1.6). Second is the conviction that ancient Jewish sources are the most important tool in the interpreter's hands for fathoming the First Gospel. While the Jewish materials are not to be rigidly isolated from the Hellenistic sources, the authors are convinced that Matthew was a Jew whose mind was first of all steeped in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Third, Davies/Allison clarify their frequent reference to rabbinic literature in the elucidation of Matthew. They are aware that because of the problem of dating, caution must be exercised in the way one draws on these later texts. Even so, they discern that the rabbinic mentality shows strong elements of conservatism, and the antiquity of some of the rabbinic traditions is accepted by all. However, in a nuanced statement, the authors admit that their citations from the Mishnah, Talmud, etc., assume only what *might* be of historical-critical or interpretive significance.

The authorship of the First Gospel is a matter of lengthy discussion (1.7-58), which in itself contains a wealth of histori-

cal and linguistic/stylistic information, along with an account of the theological tendencies of the Gospel and its patterns of Old Testament quotations (the charts comprising pages 34-57 are an amazingly detailed source of ready information). While Davies/Allison prefer not to commit themselves to the apostle Matthew as the author of this Gospel, they do conclude that he was a Jew writing for Jews, for two reasons. One is that much of Matthew's special material contains a distinctively Jewish flavor; another is that his use of the Old Testament strongly implies that he could read Hebrew.

When we turn to the exposition itself, we find that the authors are admirably consistent with their methodological presuppositions. At point after point, they are able to bring an encyclopedic knowledge of the ancient world and of Matthew's theology to bear on individual passages. For example, their treatment of the temptation narrative invokes the context of the insurgent Zealot movement at the time of Jesus' manifestation to Israel. In point of fact, we come to learn that Jesus is represented as saying "no" to the solicitations of the Devil, whereas the Zealots said "yes" to his enticements to embrace a worldly kingdom.

Another instance is the Beatitudes. Modern evangelicalism tends to look upon the Beatitudes as the "entrance requirements" of the kingdom. However, Davies/Allison demonstrate clearly that instead of being "entrance requirements," the Beatitudes are the pronouncement of eschatological blessing on the new people of God. The practical effect of this observation is that the beatitudes do not make demands so much as offer comfort and promise to the poor in spirit, etc. Before hearing Jesus' hard imperatives of the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, the Christian reader is first built up, encouraged, and consoled. To my mind, if preachers come to the realization of the true intent of the Beatitudes, as clarified by Davies/Allison, it will make a world of difference in their handling of them.

A final example is the exegesis of Matthew's transfiguration account. By a meticulous reconstruction of the Old Testa-

ment and Jewish background, the authors show that Matthew's intention is to set forth Jesus as the one who displaces the institutions—most notably the Torah—and the revered personages of Israel. He is the new law giver, and the advent of his Word has now rendered all previous forms of revelation obsolete.

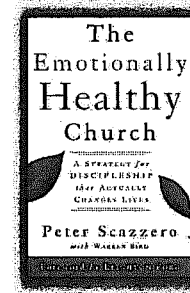
The commentary of Leon Morris on the same Gospel is something of a study in contrast. For one thing, the exposition is confined to one volume, as opposed to the projected three volumes of Davies/Allison, the first two of which are mammoth in proportion. (See, however, Allison's defense of the size of the work in his *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], xi.) This means that one might be tempted to turn to Morris first in order to get to the heart of the text. For another, Morris' presuppositions are thoroughly evangelical, with the result that he assumes the authenticity of all the sayings and doings of Jesus in the First Gospel. Therefore, the reader is not burdened with extended discussions of such points. By the same token, Morris's introduction to the Gospel is far less technical and detailed (should I say, less instructive?) than Davies/Allison. As one would expect, Morris thinks the apostle Matthew is the most likely candidate for the authorship of the Gospel.

However, it is the very predictability of Morris' book which is its shortcoming. I sensed that despite the bulk of this volume, it really does not advance our understanding of Matthew beyond that of the commentaries, say, of Hendriksen, Lenski, and Carson. Conspicuously absent is the lack of sensitivity to both the historical context of the First Gospel and the salvation history propounded by its author. The result is that Morris tends to explain the text in broad, generic (moralistic) terms, rather than in keeping with the specific salvation-historical (biblical-theological) agenda of Matthew himself. The treatment of the Beatitudes is a conspicuous example, especially as contrasted with Davies/Allison. The methodology also extends to bite-size portions of the Gospel, such as Matthew 3:7. In calling the Pharisees a "brood of vipers," John the Baptist, according to Morris, has in mind the

"venomous nature" of their opposition to the kingdom of God (58, 321). What Morris fails to perceive is that the words of the Baptist go beyond such a generalization and serve pointedly to identify the Pharisees as the "seed of the serpent," as opposed to the "seed of the woman"! Needless to say, it is such a charge that infuriated the Pharisees to the extent that they could not tolerate the Jesus movement. It is just the frontal assault of Christianity on the Jewish establishment, as exemplified by Matthew 3:7, which provides the rationale of the crucifixion. It is in this and many other instances that the Gospel assails Jewish nationalistic self-identification and promotes the messiahship of Jesus. Yet the real impact of much of Matthew's theological agenda and polemic goes unnoticed by Morris.

In fairness, it is true that the reader will find in Morris a good deal of helpful information at a considerably lower price than Davies/Allison. The commentary is certainly not a waste, and this review does not intend to place it in such a light. In addition, Evangelicals naturally will want to turn to one of their own in order to understand and teach the New Testament. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of this reviewer that preachers in particular need to wrestle with the treasury of biblical, historical, and philological information provided by a commentary such as Davies/Allison in order to grasp the text in its original intention as articulated within its own proper context. It is only thereby that the power of this and the other Gospels will be released and become applicable in ways hitherto unimagined.

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***THE EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY CHURCH:
A STRATEGY FOR DISCIPLESHIP THAT
ACTUALLY CHANGES LIVES***

Peter Scazzero with Warren Bird
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (2003)
224 pages, cloth, \$17.99

Scazzero, a pastor in Brooklyn, is keenly aware that sometimes it takes a crisis to force Christian leaders to look at their hearts and evaluate who they've become. He faced that crisis when his wife would no longer go along with his workaholic, inability to deal with conflicts, and emotional distancing tactics. He had known his life consisted of "frantic, joyless, imbalanced leadership" but had not been able to pinpoint the cause of, or solution to, the problem. "I was an imposter and didn't know it. Like most people in Christian leadership, I worked hard at being a committed and loving Christian. I labored at serving people, forgiving people, humbling myself, and being joyful. The problem was that I was miserable much of the time and unable to admit this to anyone, including myself" (55). During their exploration of the problems in their marriage, Scazzero realized just how much he and his church had encouraged *doing over being*, and neglected—even excused—obvious problems in the lives of leaders and parishioners. As a result, he has written this book to call Christians to a deeper self-awareness of the hidden motives that drive behavior. He wants believers everywhere to examine the glaring inconsistencies between their spiritual activities and their intra and interpersonal life. His thesis is clear—"It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature" (50).

For those not convinced that this is a serious problem, the book is laden with many painful examples of Christian leaders involved in tremendous ministries and yet ignorant of the topography of their own inner life that hinders the gospel and destroys those around them. Scazzero forces readers to wrestle

with the fact that the Church often exalts acts of public service while paying only lip service to discipleship.

For the remainder of the book, Scazzero details six principles for leaders and churches to follow in order to achieve an emotionally healthy life. These principles are designed to help individuals stop focusing on what they are doing in order to become self-aware of what drives their feelings and behaviors. If a person follows these principles, they should be able to: examine their internal responses to life in an honest and reflective manner, choose not to continue actions based on powerful past experiences and behavior, be able to admit weaknesses freely and accept criticism, acknowledge limitations and refuse the savior mentality, grieve losses and disappointments, and incarnate Christ in interpersonal interactions. Readers may complete a short inventory in chapter 4 designed to give personal assessment on each of the six principles. While not a scientific tool, answers to each question provide ample opportunity for further self-examination.

For some, Scazzero's use of psychological language may be a turn-off. Despite his thesis that one cannot be spiritually mature while being emotionally immature, he tends to talk about them as if one could separate spirituality from emotionality. This is a natural reaction to seeing how the Church has so neglected the development of self-awareness in favor of, "accumulat[ing] knowledge, skills, and experience" (111). However, I find his willingness to focus on emotions refreshing and worth reading. Contemporary Reformed Christians have all too often emphasized right thinking over honest acknowledgement of weakness and vulnerability. Many Christians live under the cover of pretense, with little ability to see why they do what they do. If that is the case for you or your church, take a look at his chart (114-115) distinguishing between prideful and humble churches. If that doesn't help, check out the section where he uses the younger and older sons in the prodigal son parable as examples of common interpersonal problems in the Church.

If there is a weakness with the book, it seems that not enough attention is paid to the role the heart plays in how we

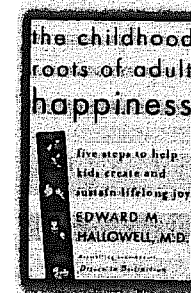
act. Scazzero does an excellent job explaining how situational factors and temperament play into how we relate to others. However, some may understand what is happening (e.g. I can't stand to be criticized because of the messages my parents gave me as a child) but not clearly see their motives and desires in the present (e.g. I want to look successful and put together to all people). Those who might want more in-depth discussion of the heart may want to read Paul Tripp's book, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (listed in the annotated bibliography).

The book's strengths are its numerous real-life examples of healthy and unhealthy lives and its simple (but often overlooked) solutions to an unexamined life (e.g. questions to ask to explore what is going on in our relationships, questions about family history and other major influences, ways to admit weaknesses, to grieve properly, to stop trying to please everyone).

Scazzero's ultimate goal is to enable readers to pay attention to the inner life because what is going on inside bleeds over into our relationships with others. In the words of Scazzero, "Bold announcements of what God is doing or saying are common. People who follow the humble way of Jesus are much more difficult to find" (174).

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**THE CHILDHOOD ROOTS OF
ADULT HAPPINESS**

Edward M. Hallowell

New York: Ballantine Books (2002)

240 pages, cloth, \$22.95

Are children's lives, and their sense of worth and importance, determined more by genetics or by social training

and family influence? Arguments for both positions abound. Child psychiatrist Edward Hallowell makes a compelling case that the *primary* influence in adult happiness is connection, especially to one or both parents.

Hallowell argues that what good parents need is love, wonder, and the confidence to believe that they can trust their instincts. He gives the reader a five-step plan that any parent can use to provide for their children the gift of happiness. The five are: connection, play, practice, mastery and recognition. The goal, Hallowell writes, is clear. Raise children with healthy self-esteem, moral awareness and spiritual values. Wealth, position and status are not nearly as important as many think. Children who have been abandoned have become happy. How? By the impact of at least one adult (in some cases not even a parent) who helped the child connect meaningfully with themselves and others, and thereby feel their worth.

In a chapter appropriately titled, "A Crazy Love That Never Quits," Hallowell makes a case that adult happiness is more important than high achievement. They are not mutually exclusive but when achievement becomes the goal, in itself, the results will usually be unhappy and unsatisfied adults. What fuels achievement, and happiness, is the desire to discover and to enjoy. A person who enjoys what they do has "an unstoppable curiosity and enthusiasm" (39). Parents should encourage hard work in their children but they need to adapt this encouragement with the precise temperament of their child. Any coach can tell you that you must motivate athletes with approaches that vary, finding what fits each particular person best. The very best way to do this was described by the great college basketball legend, John Wooden, when he said of his style, "I try to find a player doing something right and tell him." Hallowell agrees and shows you why this works.

I find another way Hallowell understands this point to be quite insightful as well.

Kagan's warning not to expect too much from your child does not warn against pressure *per se* as much as it warns parents to make sure the pressure is of the right kind. "Do your best" is

advice that instills a good kind of pressure. "Please me," on the other hand, is a request that can haunt a child forever, instill toxic pressure (39).

In the chapter "Think Back," the author encourages readers to go back to their own childhood and ask, "What went right in your childhood? What (if anything!) from back then has led to whatever happiness you have found today" (44)? I found this immensely helpful as I thought back over my best memories of what brought me joy in my childhood. The answers were far simpler than I would have imagined. Most of them had little to do with great accomplishments but rather great joys because of deep connection with others. Try it, you might be surprised.

At age thirty-seven I discovered a great deal about my childhood roots of happiness, or lack thereof. I realized, in a profound way, why I was unhappy with God and often with others. I realized how profoundly my lack of happiness related to my theology and how I expressed that theology in public and private. Having faced these questions with profound soul searching, I believe that Hallowell offers the Christian reader a wonderfully helpful resource through which many could be enabled to do the same.

This is a simple, but readable, book. It relieves parents of the stress that they need complicated strategies developed by experts to raise happy and healthy children. This is a book the average parent can take great joy in reading and using. It is also a book for adults who simply wish to understand why they are so unhappy so often. Don't let the title put you off.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-chief