

Samson, the *heros* of the old tale, is also Samson the 'judge'—the saviour of God's people—and the figure of the *Heros Christos* who was to come.

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A RECENT BOOK ON THE GOSPEL STORY

'Would you please recommend to me a good life of our Lord?' That question is frequently asked, and as frequently causes embarrassment. And yet what more natural and more reasonable question for the Christian? The number of books telling the story of our Lord's life must be legion. But I doubt whether many have ever received universal approval. The truth is that to write a life of our Lord which will have the fulness of detail and the clarity of sequence we associate with biographies, is an impossible task, if at the same time it is to remain within the limits imposed by the sources. It is with a full realisation of the difficulties involved, and with sincere appreciation of the effort which has been made, that I venture to examine a recent book¹ on this subject, in the hope that a book which without any doubt will prove highly popular will not at the same time prove harmful.

This is an unusual and attractive book. On the left-hand page there is the gospel story told in the words of the *Knox Version*, whilst on the right-hand page and in a different type there is a commentary on the text by Fr Cox. Both pages have been made to correspond with great ingenuity so that further elucidation of the text can be obtained with the minimum of inconvenience. Both author and publisher have shown considerable skill in bringing this about, and the book is very well produced.

Fr Cox's aim has been to try and provide all that is required in one book: both the Gospels and the minimum amount of explanation necessary for their understanding. He is determined to present our Lord's life as a well-ordered whole, and not, to use his own phrase, as a haphazard jumble of events. Since the Gospels themselves are in no wise ordered biographies of our Lord, he has had to impose upon his material a sequence and a plan which is bound to be conjectural. This he has done with the greatest emphasis, giving the precise time and

¹ Ronald Knox and Ronald Cox, *The Gospel Story*, Burns & Oates, London 1959, pp. 437, 18s

place for each scene. Thus, for example, his commentary on the Annunciation is headed '25 March 5 B.C.'; on the birth of John the Baptist, '24 June 5 B.C.'; on the Sermon, 'Mount of Beatitudes June 28 A.D.'; on the parable of the sower, 'Ain Tineh November 28 A.D.'; on the parable of the dishonest steward, 'Pella February 30 A.D.'; on the institution of the Eucharist, 'The Cenacle 7.30 p.m. Thursday'; and on the death of Jesus, 'Golgotha 3-5 p.m. Friday.' Fr Cox writes in his preface: 'I have also given considerable attention to time and place for each scene; not that I think them important. They are meant to give an atmosphere of reality; our Lord's life is fact, not fiction. They are the historical background against which he moved; don't let them distract you from him.' I must confess that they proved a distraction to me. Undoubtedly such precisions of time and place achieve their purpose of giving an atmosphere of reality to our Lord's life; but, I would suggest, at too great a price. It seems pedagogically unsound to give such precise indications when they depend so much on conjecture. It is extremely difficult to disabuse people of what they have wrongly taken to be facts. It is not the author's intention that they should be taken as facts, and in his commentary he often indicates this. Thus, for instance, 'The location of all eight parables is probably the rocky promontory between Ain Tineh and Tabgha' (p. 111). or in reference to the Our Father, where his commentary is headed 'Mount Olivet November 29 A.D.,' he writes: 'The traditional place for the Our Father is the mount of Olives, above the garden of Gethsemani; this gives special point to his words there on Holy Thursday night' (p. 223); or in reference to the dispute about Beelsebub, the commentary on which is headed 'Bethlehem November 29 A.D.,' he writes: 'The only indication of place for this clash with the Pharisees is the mention of the "the desert" in the next paragraph. Our Lord had moved away from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, but was still in sight of the desert of Judea; either Bethlehem or Hebron would suit this circumstance admirably' (p. 225). The last quotation is an unusually long reference to the conjectural nature of the location, but even here the bold-type heading may blot out the comment following. The danger of too exaggerated a precision is all the greater because this book is not the story of our Lord's life in the author's own words: it is the gospel story in the words of the Gospels, and readers will perhaps wrongly associate the precision of the commentary with the Gospels themselves.

The text used is that of the *Knox Version* but with certain interesting changes. Thus direct speech is indicated by the usual quotation marks; the obsolete second person singular (I quote Fr Cox) has been replaced by the more common plural; time, distance and

measures are given in modern equivalents ; certain words have been changed, such as 'multitude' to 'crowd' and 'palsied' to 'paralysed' ; and where the Greek is different from the Knox text, corrections have sometimes been made : thus for instance at Luke 2:38 'Jerusalem' is read instead of 'Israel.' An interesting change to which Fr Cox draws our attention is his version 'There was no room for them where the guests lodged' instead of the *Knox* 'There was no room for them in the inn' (Luke 2:7). The author comments : 'I think *guest* room is the correct meaning of *kataluma* (translated 'upper room,' p. 342), not the traditional village inn ; our Lord was born in a cave under a house, not in one out in the fields. It fits in better with eastern ways : an inn was used only by passing travellers. It also removes the slur on the people of Bethlehem. St Joseph shows up better as the guardian of the Holy Family ; there is no hurried arrival on Christmas Eve' (p. 3). Further : 'A four days' journey, with a donkey to carry their belongings, brought them to the home of one of Joseph's relatives, quite likely his father, Heli (p. 34) ; Jacob (p. 16) was not his natural father. There were other visitors there, but in a few weeks the guest room would be theirs ; meanwhile the cave-basement would give them a place to sleep. Actually this must have appealed to Mary ; it would be the most secluded part of the house.' But what of the shepherds, looking for 'a child still in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger' ? The commentary runs : 'It is not clear whether the angel's information was sufficient to guide the shepherds to the house where Jesus was born, or whether further assistance was needed. The mention of a manger would tell them to look in one of the many caves cut in the rock and used as shelters for animals ; there would probably be only the one with a light showing so late at night. Actually the basilica of the Nativity is on the eastern edge of Bethlehem ; so they would not have to wander through the city looking for a lighted basement' (p. 19).

These quotations are sufficient to show how vivid and positive the commentary is ; the very staccato style in which it is written will inspire confidence. It is obviously impossible for the author to discuss different views on the interpretation of the text, and he must therefore give that which seems to be preferable, without the qualifications and the hesitations which would find a place in a fuller commentary. Neither is it surprising that in pursuance of his avowed purpose of giving 'an atmosphere of reality' and of showing that 'our Lord's life is fact, not fiction,' the author has made many conjectures. Thus 'It was not until after his parents' death that he (John the Baptist) lived in the desert.' There are two reasons why Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem : 'Joseph . . . still had a big problem on his

hands : Jesus would be born of parents who had been married only five months before. He overcame the difficulty very simply by moving his home to Bethlehem. He had to make the journey there to meet the requirements of the Roman census' (p. 17). The historical background is skilfully sketched in, with great economy of words, and a wealth of information on Jewish customs is given apropos of such scenes as Gabriel's appearance to Zachary in the Temple, the parable of the sower, the burial and raising of Lazarus, and the crucifixion of our Lord. On some occasions the author does refer to certain difficulties and differences of opinion, for example with regard to the time of our Lord's purification of the Temple and the locating of Emmaus. But a violent shock awaits the readers of this book if they should later come face to face and for the first time with the doubts and difficulties, and the obscurities and controversies which further investigation of the Gospels causes.

The gospel story itself is a skilful and intricate harmonisation from the four Gospels. According to Fr Cox, 'All four Gospels are given ; not a single sentence has been left out.' It is difficult to find out in what exact sense this claim is made. Perhaps the meaning is that some words of each verse of each Gospel find a place in his text. Thus, for instance, if we look for Luke 2:39 'And now, when all had been done that the law of the Lord required, they returned to Galilee, and to their own town Nazareth,' we are referred by the chronological harmony to p. 24 and the closing sentence of the story of the Flight into Egypt, where we read : 'And so, receiving a warning in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee ; where he came to live in their own town of Nazareth, in fulfilment of what was said by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."' This is a quotation of Matt. 2:22-3, except for the words *their own town of*, which replace *a town called*, and are found in Luke 2:39. Between Luke 2:38, the Presentation in the Temple, and Luke 2:39 with its implication that as soon as this had been completed the Holy family returned to Nazareth, the author has fitted in the coming of the Wise Men and the Flight into Egypt, from Matthew's Gospel.

This ingenuity seems rather forced sometimes. Here is a quotation from the story of the Paralytic let down through a roof, combining Luke and Mark (in italics) : 'Just then (four)¹ men brought there on a bed one who was paralysed, whom they tried to carry in and set down in Jesus' presence. But, finding no way of carrying him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop, *stripped the tiles*

¹ The word 'four' is not found in any of the Synoptics at this place in the sentence, but we read in Mark 2:3 'And now they came to bring a palsied man to him, four of them carrying him at once.'

from the roof over the place where Jesus was, and made an opening; then they let him down between the tiles, bed and all, into the clear space in front of Jesus.' The double mention of the tiles seems clumsy, but presumably it was necessary to substantiate the claim that not a single sentence has been left out, since otherwise Mark 2:4 would have been unrepresented. This method cannot but lead to much snipping out of words from the gospel text, irrespective of what precedes or follows them.

A well-known problem is that raised by a comparison of Matt. 20:29-34 (the cure of two blind men on the way out of Jericho), Mark 10:46-52 (the cure of Bartimaeus on the way out of Jericho) and Luke 18:35-43 (the cure of a blind man on the way into Jericho). Here all difficulties are removed :¹

When he came near Jericho, *with his disciples and with a great crowd,*² there was a blind man, *Bartimaeus, sitting there by the wayside begging.* And he, hearing a crowd passing by, asked what it meant; so they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth was going past. Whereupon he cried out, 'Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.' Those who were in front rebuked him, and told him to be silent, but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' *Then Jesus stopped, and said, 'Call him here.'*³ *So they summoned the blind man; 'Take heart,' they said, 'and rise up; he is summoning you.'* Whereupon he threw away his cloak and leapt to his feet, and so came to Jesus. *Then Jesus answered him, 'What would you have me do for you?'* *And the blind man said to him, 'Lord, give me back my sight.'* AND JESUS, MOVED WITH COMPASSION, TOUCHED (his)⁴ EYES, AND said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has brought you recovery.' And at once the man recovered his sight, and followed Jesus on his way, glorifying God; all the people, too, gave praise to God at seeing it.

Another problem, that of the one animal or two in the Palm Sunday procession, disappears from the following text:

When he was approaching Bethphage,⁵ close to the mountain which is called Olivet, *he sent two of his disciples on an errand; 'Go into the village that faces you,' he told them, 'and the first thing you will find there upon entering will be A SHE-ASS AND a colt tethered AT HER SIDE, one on which no man has ever ridden; untie it,⁶ and bring it to me. And if*

¹ I have indicated Mark by italics, Matthew by small capitals, Luke by ordinary type and John by bold type. Where a phrase is exactly the same in two or more Gospels, it has been impossible for me to know from which Gospel it has been taken. If therefore my arrangement in these cases should result in any verse of any of the Gospels being unrepresented, this is accidental.

² This phrase, only found in Mark, is immediately preceded by 'As he was leaving Jericho' (Mark 10:46)

³ This is a new translation of Mark 10:49a. 'Call' and 'summoned' are translations of the same word in the Greek and Vulgate.

⁴ Matthew is the only one of the Synoptics who mentions the touching of the eyes. But he recounts the healing of two blind men, so we find here the word 'his' substituted for 'their.'

⁵ Luke, who is being quoted here, adds 'and Bethany' (19:29—as does Mark 11:1), but it is omitted by Matthew.

⁶ According to Matthew, who alone mentions the she-ass, it is this latter animal which is tethered. Mark and Luke mention that the colt is tethered.

anyone asks you, "Why are you doing that?" tell him, "The Lord has need of it, and is sending it back here quite soon."¹ ALL THIS WAS SO ORDAINED, TO FULFIL THE WORD SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET: 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Sion; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, HUMBL Y, RIDING ON AN ASS, ON A COLT WHOSE MOTHER HAS BORNE THE YOKE.' The disciples did not understand all this at the time; only after Jesus had attained his glory did they remember what they had done, and how it fulfilled the words written of him. So the two he had appointed went on their way, and found the colt tethered before a door at the entrance, just as he had told them. As they were untying it, its owners asked them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' And they said, 'Because the Lord has need of it,' and were allowed to take it. So they brought THE SHE-ASS AND ITS COLT to Jesus, and saddled it with their garments, and bade Jesus mount.

In this way we can have both the ass and its foal, without the disciples saddling *them* (Matt. 21:7) both, a strange detail put in for no other reason, one suspects, than that in the quotation from Zach. 9:9 we have 'on an ass *and* on a foal.'²

These examples will have revealed the ingenuity of this four-Gospels-in-one, but I hope that they have also shown its dangers. Once again, surprise and disillusion may be the fate of those familiar with this book, who later graduate to a reading of the Gospels themselves. The problem of writing a full and factual life of our Lord, a biography in the usual sense of the word, is indeed a painful and embarrassing one. It is something for which we all clamour. The apocryphal writings testify abundantly to the fact that there has always been that longing. But is this the best way of satisfying it? If authors write lives of our Lord in their own words there is always the feeling, and rightly so, that these can never take the place of the Gospels themselves. Yet if we read one Gospel, we are missing something of what is to be found in the others; moreover the Gospels are difficult to read with a clear understanding: in Fr Cox's words, 'A library is necessary before you can get started.' Instead, he has offered us the very words of the Gospels without the need to read four separate books; he has offered us the words of the Gospel without the inconsequences and the vagueness each of the four present when read as biographies of our Lord. He has also offered us a vivid and often fascinating commentary which brings the text still more to life. Perhaps many of his readers will never experience the difficulties he has thereby created. But this, unfortunately, will only be so if they never read and study the four Gospels. For my part, I cannot but wish that Fr Cox had either written the gospel story in his own words, or that he had given us a text which, incident by incident, he had chosen from one of the four Gospels, accompanied by a commentary in which

¹ The last phrase is a new and correct translation of Mark 11:3b.

² cf. J. Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 3. Aufl. 1956, p. 299

conjecture played a lesser role, and one more easily recognised as such, by those whose wish to read a life of our Lord but cannot study the sacred texts in their proper setting.

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BOOK REVIEW

Adrian Hastings, *Prophet and Witness in Jerusalem*. A study of the teaching of Saint Luke. Longmans, Green and Company, 1958. pp. 200. 16s.

The author's purpose is to give a coherent view of St Luke's theological teachings in his Gospel and *Acts*. The book is directed to all serious students of the New Testament, but this should not deter the layman in this vast field since it is he rather than the expert who will find it illuminating and interesting. In it we find the fruit of much modern research by exegetes into the approach, perspective and preoccupations of Luke.

The first four of the ten chapters are concerned with a discussion of Luke's sources and the importance of such an inquiry. The problem of Luke's connection with the other Synoptics and the contributions of John and Paul to Luke's perspective are summarily dismissed. A Hebrew document originating in the Jerusalem community under the influence of James and our Lady is accepted as underlying the first two chapters of the Gospel. The question of his sources for *Acts* is relegated to a footnote on p. 125. Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward (Luke 8:3), and Simon of Cyrene are the sources that receive most attention from the author. While it is probable that Joanna was a source, either directly or indirectly, for the Herodian material and narrative of the Passion and Resurrection, her contribution would be very small; in the Herodian material the author makes no attempt to reconcile 13:31 with 23:8. The identification of Simon of Cyrene with the Simeon of Acts 13:1 and again with the Simeon of Acts 15:14 is unfounded conjecture; the Simeon of the latter text is obviously Peter (15:7), designated by the Hebrew form of his name which is neither strange nor unique (pp. 36-7)—cf. critical text of 2 Pet. 1:1.

The distinction between the 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (Luke 1:2) may be admitted, but the same can hardly be said of the assertion that Luke is referring chiefly to Paul in his Prologue (pp. 29-30). Similarly the distinction between the primitive 'martyrion' and 'kerygma' (p. 28ff.) is rather arbitrary.