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Recommended Reading: The Gospels in Current Study

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recommended reading

***The Gospels in Current Study*, Simon Kistemaker, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972, \$2.95.**

This book represents an attempt by an Evangelical to synthesize and evaluate the more prominent recent scholarly studies on the four Gospels. The author, who is an associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, summarizes and assesses contemporary scholarly discoveries and views regarding these important Christian documents in six concise chapters. It is a very readable and informative survey of present-day investigations and their significance from a conservative stance.

The chapter on Manuscripts consists of three sections dealing respectively with the Gnostic library found at Nag-Hammadi, Egypt, in 1946, the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 and more recently, and papyri discovered since 1931. Among the Nag-Hammadi documents attention is given to the so-called Gospel of Thomas, which contains 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, about half of which are identical with, and doubtless derived from, our canonical Gospels. An attempt is then made to assess the bearing of the Qumran documents on New Testament studies, particularly as they may relate to the Gospel of John.

With regard to the papyri, the main emphasis is on the discovery of such New Testament manuscripts as the Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, and the more recent Bodmer Papyri, though some notice is given to the value of nonliterary documents for the study of the Greek of the New Testament. The Biblical papyri are the earliest extant witnesses for the text of the New Testament documents.

The flood of recent English versions has made even laymen aware of textual variants in the manuscripts. Hence the need for some introduction to the science of textual criticism, which this book gives in a mere five pages. Even so, mention is made of a few of the prominent textual problems created by the differences in manuscripts, such as the ending of Mark, the story of the woman taken in adultery, the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, the story of the angel troubling the waters of the Pool of Bethesda, and the trinitarian passage in 1 John 5:7.

The author also gives a brief notice to the synoptic problem, which concerns an explanation of the complicated combination of similarities and divergencies between the accounts of the first three gospels. Some attention is given to the de-

velopments in Source, Form, and Reduction Criticism and a brief evaluation is presented.

The modern search for the historical Jesus is especially dealt with. The German scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, felt that we can know very little about the real Jesus of Nazareth of the first century. Bultmann wrestled with the question: "How must we interpret the Bible in our scientific age?" For him the universe is a closed system in which a nexus of cause and effect holds sway. Hence he denied the possibility of the miraculous, feeling that this element must be "demythologized" to make the gospel message meaningful to twentieth-century man.

Kistemaker evaluates Bultmannianism from the point of view of an Evangelical, then proceeds to give some attention to the "New Hermeneutic" and the "New Quest for the Historical Jesus" by the post-Bultmannians.

The author is now ready to deal with each of the Gospels separately—the author, characteristics, purpose, and emphasis of each. The final chapter is devoted to three of the outstanding theological themes of the Gospels: the Son of man, the Son of God, and the resurrection. The significance of each of these is assessed. Surprisingly, one of the chief themes of Jesus' teaching—viz., the kingdom of God—finds little place in this book.

The brevity of the volume makes it impossible to deal adequately with some of the current views on the Gospels. Nevertheless, the minister will benefit from being brought up-to-date by an examination of some of the more prominent trends in the study of the Gospels.

Walter F. Specht

***Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, Dean M. Kelley, Harper and Row, 179 pages.**

This book should be read and carefully studied by all ministers and church leaders who pray and long for a revival and reformation in our own church.

As a result of his research, the author maintains that churches that have become lax in their discipline and demands upon their members are weak and losing out. On the other hand, churches and societies that doctrinally may make little or no sense at all are growing, apparently due to the fact that they impose strict discipline and make heavy demands upon their adherents. Examples cited include Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. The author maintains, however, that "renewal does not take hold unless

it is embodied and lived out by a particular group, who show the way to a stronger faith by following it themselves." "What costs little accomplishes little." "The greater the effort desired, the greater the effort required to achieve it. And there is no effect greater than the enlistment of men in the service of *meaning*—what some would call the saving of souls—if it were easy it would not be salvation."

The book is replete with thought-provoking ideas that demand serious and considered study by the minister and church worker who desire to build a stronger, Spirit-filled church.

Jeremia Florea

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