
This book is essentially a revision of an earlier work that first appeared in 1948. The original aim, "to help the minister in study, preaching, and pastoral concern and the lay person in appreciation of the parables" (p. 9), has been retained. In retrospect, however, in the twenty-seven-year interval between the original and the present edition at least a dozen new studies have appeared, and the material from Qumran and Nag Hammadi has had to be taken into account.

Smith's approach to the parables is apparent from the outset. As the title suggests, it is the parables of Jesus that are of interest. The methodology of C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias, both of whom assumed that the parables in their extant form display the hallmarks of ecclesiastical redaction, is implemented (p. 37). Smith emphasizes their controversial, provocative nature, which he describes in terms of militancy (p. 12), disputation (p. 13), and as tactical weapons in Jesus' strategy (p. 14). In short, as he himself suggests, "Jesus used parables, and Jesus was put to death. The two facts are related, and it is necessary to understand the connection" (p. 11).

This view of the parables (as weapons of warfare) is related to Smith's overall approach to the gospels, and to some extent the approach is to be commended. "To be too exclusively concerned with the Gospels as texts," he argues, "is to stand apart from the history of which they are but reflections" (p. 32). The history of the NT period was marked by violent political tension (p. 33). A prime factor in the story was Jesus' consciousness of high mission; he knew that "the destiny of men was in some sense determined by their reaction to him" (p. 35).

To some extent (as I suggested) this approach is to be commended. On this view, however, the gospels too easily become interesting documents of ancient history with little contemporary relevance. The crisis for Jesus was at once both historical and eschatological, and the latter cannot be minimized. At times Smith seems to lose sight of the eschatological tension that pervades the parables, emphasizing the historical setting (the "realized" eschatology) at the expense of "imminent" eschatology. This is explicit in his interpretation of many of the parables including the rich fool (p. 180); the unjust judge (pp. 185 ff.); and the ten virgins, whose lesson is not so much "watch" as it is "when the call comes, be wholly committed to do what is demanded" (pp. 117 ff.). See also his treatment of "The Kingdom of God and the Parables" (pp. 211 f.).

It must be said, however, in spite of comments with regard to the eschatological thrust of the parables that were didactic and revelatory as much as they were controversial, that this is a good book. It contains a wealth of material that will be of interest not only to the pastor and to the lay person but also to the specialist. In particular, a close reading of the final chapter will pay dividends. It is unfortunate that the footnotes (which are most helpful) appear at the end of the book. The index to names and subjects is adequate, but there is no Scripture index, nor are Biblical references given in the index to parables.

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This book is a substantially unrevised doctoral dissertation submitted to Oxford University in the Trinity term of 1975. The work is scholarly, exhibiting good command of the material and mature judgment; yet it is also appealing in its unusual clarity and straightforward style.
Moloney complains that the Johannine "Son of man" texts have not been treated in any major monograph, certainly not one that attempts to synthesize a Johannine "Son of man" Christology based on the gospel as it has come down to us. There are numerous studies on proposed backgrounds to the title, on comparisons with synoptic usage, on the relation between the title and some isolated theme—but no major synthesis. Moloney's work is an attempt to plug that gap.

Following an introduction that competently surveys the literature, Moloney devotes chapters two to nine to a detailed examination of the crucial passages. The tenth and final chapter is a summarizing conclusion. Moloney holds that the "Son of man" references are neither synonymous with "Son" or "Son of God," nor are they isolated logia that have not really been well integrated into John's gospel. Rather, they are used to unfold successively that Jesus is the incarnate Logos, the one in whom God is supremely revealed, especially in the humiliation/exaltation of the cross. The Son of man is the one in whom the revelation of God and concomitant judgment of the world are uniquely located. Thus "Son of man" is both a Christological and a soteriological title and stands at the heart of Johannine theology.

It is always possible to disagree with an author on this or that exegetical conclusion. But rather than listing the places where I remain unconvinced by Moloney's argument, I prefer to mention here what is in my view the book's greatest strength—namely, his methodological approach. Moloney insists that, whatever the sources that be behind the fourth gospel, the text as we have it must have made sense to somebody at some time, or it would not be that way. Citing C. H. Dodd he argues that it is the interpreter's first task to interpret an ancient text as we find it, if it is at all possible to make sense of it in this manner. In each of chapters two through nine, Moloney seeks to outline the thematic flow of the argument (he calls this "structuralism," but his procedure is far removed from the left wing of the Arminian structuralists). In passage after passage his interpretation of the flow of the material is remarkably apt. Then, having established this flow, he interprets the "Son of man" saying within it. Such a procedure offers a refreshingly realistic approach to the interpretation of the fourth gospel.

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