

## BOOK REVIEWS

Léon-Dufour, Xavier, S.J. *Resurrection and the Message of Easter*. Trans. by R. N. Wilson. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975. xxii + 330 pp. \$9.95.

For many Catholics, concern with the Bible has long been a Protestant phenomenon. No longer so. Since 1943, when Pope Pius XII officially authorized exegetes to apply the method of "form criticism" to the biblical text, and more particularly in the decade since Vatican Council II, Catholic biblical scholarship has enjoyed a remarkable development.

Among persons whom Catholics can thank for this transformation is the French Jesuit, Xavier Léon-Dufour. In the tradition of L. de Grandmaison, M.-J. Lagrange, Alfred Loisy, and Maurice Goguel, Léon-Dufour has for some 30 years been pioneering Catholic biblical studies in Europe. And in this recently translated book, he has dealt with a most fundamental topic: the Resurrection of Jesus.

This publication is no "popularization." It is serious biblical scholarship of a very high order, directed toward the "educated layman." Yet, there is little arid or dusty about this balanced and closely argued study.

The author has no intention to answer the ultimate issue—Did Jesus rise or not? He begins with the existential question: What meaning can the Resurrection of Jesus have for me today? What does "resurrected" mean? What was the Easter experience of Jesus' disciples, and what is its significance for me, two millennia later? Probing the nature of that experience is what the book is about. It is also concerned with the question of language: Can the Easter message be uttered in any other language than that of "resurrection," and, while intelligible to our contemporaries, remain within the authentic Christian tradition?

With his usual care and patience, the author leads us through the stages that went to form the gospel text as we have it today. The task is arduous, conjectural at times, and bound to disturb the thought habits and feelings of more than a few Roman Catholics. First, Léon-Dufour leads us through the earliest oral traditions, with their fundamental themes of the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus Christ (chaps. 1-3). He then attempts to identify the origins of the various narratives of Christ's appearances after the Resurrection (chaps. 4-6). In the third stage, he discusses each of the gospel accounts on its own, and turns to explain the different ways in which each author contributed to the Christian understanding of the Easter message (chaps. 7-10). Finally, he enters the hermeneutical issue, the problem of "translating" and communicating that message into a language intelligible today (chap. 11): What principles of preaching shall one isolate from the numerous ways of presenting the message of Christ's Resurrection

adopted 1900 years ago? What part shall be accorded to the historical fact itself? Here Léon-Dufour's position is conservative, and the author remains wary of current "gnostics" who propagate a doctrine which, while inspired by the gospel, has cut itself off from its historical roots. By way of example, an appendix suggests a few models of a way of preaching the Easter message on the basis of the gospel narratives (pp. 250-261).

A short bibliography, a useful glossary, and an index add to the scope and usefulness of this important work, a model of clarity and order. Léon-Dufour, however, seems to have been badly served by his translator and publisher. I have unfortunately not been able to lay my hands on the French original. But, besides all too frequent misprints, the text is rather incoherent on p. 236; the last complete sentence on p. 242 is intelligible only if the "not" is removed; and the last sentence on p. 243 only makes sense if a "not" is added at the beginning.

My recommendation? Read the book, but preferably in French.

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RAOUL DEDEREN

Longenecker, Richard N. *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975. 246 pp. Paperback, \$4.95.

In this solid piece of work, the author first sets forth the principles of Jewish hermeneutics in the first century. Then, beginning with Jesus himself and moving on throughout the NT, he deals with the treatment of the OT in the NT. After Jesus, he discusses early Christian preaching, Paul, the Evangelists, Hebrews, and the rest of the NT books. The orientation of the book is conservative but with an awareness of the spectrum of views current today.

Since Christianity arose out of Judaism, it is natural to look for Jewish hermeneutics for points of contacts. Characteristic of Jewish hermeneutics are literalist, midrashic, peshet, and allegorical interpretations. The Qumran sectaries especially employed peshet interpretation, while Philo was the champion of allegorical interpretation. All of these types of interpretation are found in the NT in varying degree, but the important difference between Jewish and Christian interpretation is the latter's Christocentric perspective, which found its origin in Jesus himself and continued after his ascension through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

While there is this dominating hermeneutical key throughout the NT, there are still differences in emphasis and patterns. In the distribution of OT quotations, a clear pattern emerges. Those writings which are addressed to Jews or Jewish Christians are understandably rich in quotations, while the writings addressed to a non-Jewish audience generally lack OT quotations. Within certain books both of these phenomena appear, such as Mark and Luke, since while they address non-Jewish audiences, they include the sayings of Jesus. The editorial comments lack quotations, but where they report Jesus' sayings these quotations naturally appear. And this is somewhat true with Paul's writings, depending on the kind of audience to which he is writing.