

Hengel, Martin. *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977. xii + 99 pp. \$4.50.

This book is not a treatise on the Theology of the Cross, but in the author's words provides "historical preliminaries for a presentation of the *theologia crucis* of Paul" (p. 86). Hengel wants to show why the early Christian missionaries in general and the apostle Paul in particular met such a universal contempt for a religion in which its central god-figure, Jesus Christ, had met a shameful death as a convicted criminal. His work is thus a commentary on Paul's statement made after about twenty years of missionary experience among both Jews and Gentiles, that the message of the "crucified Christ" was a "stumbling block" (*skandalon*) to the Jews and a real "folly" (*mōria*) to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1: 23).

In a well-documented way the author shows that crucifixion, as the ultimate penalty, was remarkably widespread in antiquity. It seems to have been introduced by either the Phoenicians or the Persians and then occasionally to have been also applied by the Greeks, and especially by the Carthaginians, to punish primarily high officials, army commanders, and rebels. In Palestine, the Maccabean rulers also adopted this mode of execution for their opponents; but strangely enough, Herod the Great, who by nature was a cruel despot and had many of his adversaries killed, never used crucifixion. However, crucifixion found its most widespread use among the Romans, who inflicted it on the lower classes such as slaves, common criminals, and unruly foreign subjects. They considered it an effective deterrent, and for this reason carried it out on public squares or principal streets and roads so that the greatest possible number of people would witness the ultimate humiliation of the gruesome punishment of a naked individual condemned to this form of death. This was usually aggravated by an inhuman flogging of the victim preceding the crucifixion and a denial of a burial after it. From the available records it seems that crucifixion as a punishment was accepted by all levels of the public, for it was hardly ever criticized in the ancient world.

To the author's credit it must be said that he presents his evidence by means of direct quotations in Greek and Latin, with English translations for those readers (and they may be in the majority) whose knowledge of classical Greek and Latin is rusty. The reader can also be grateful for the full references that are given for all statements made.

Since crucifixion was a mode of punishment meted out to slaves, who were considered chattel in the Roman world, and to criminals and rebels, it is understandable that the preaching of a "Savior of mankind" and "Son of God" who had shared the fate of a convicted criminal, met only mockery and rejection. The mythology of the Greeks and Romans knew of no clear examples of a crucified god worthy of worship. The only exception to this claim, and not even a good one, was the demigod Prometheus, who, against the will of the gods, had revealed fire to man. For this reason he was chained to the rocks as a punishment so that an eagle could pick out his liver during the day, which then grew back during the night so that the punishment could start all over again the next day.

The only Roman who was held in high honor by the state although he had been crucified was the General M. Atilius Regulus. And Regulus was used by Tertullian as the prototype of a martyr who was an example that even an honorable and innocent Roman nobleman could suffer this mode of shameful death (*Ad Nationes*, 1.18.5). As an army general Regulus had fallen into the hands of the Carthaginians during the First Punic War. Sent to Rome by his captors to negotiate a peace treaty with Rome, he counseled the Senate to press on with the war and then returned to Carthage to

honor his promise to return if his mission should fail. Thereupon the Carthaginians tortured him in the most inhuman way and then crucified him.

Aside from the foregoing examples, the ancients seem not to have known of heroes or gods who had shared the fate of low criminals. For this reason it was extremely difficult for an ancient man or woman to embrace a religion which required the worshiper to adore a criminal condemned to death by crucifixion, to pray to him, and to accept him as a personal savior.

The extent of the contempt in which the Christian religion was held for worshiping a convicted and crucified criminal is illustrated by a caricature scratched during the second century A.D. into the plaster of a wall on the Palatine hill in Rome. This depicts a man in the mode of adoration in front of a crucified individual who had the head of an ass, while the accompanying inscription says in mockery, "Alexamenus worships his god" (Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* [Princeton, 1946], p. 292, Fig. 129).

As far as it goes, Hengel's book is a most valuable piece of work. Yet, the reader is disappointed that it does not treat a variety of questions dealing with the manner and techniques of crucifixions, even though there may be difficulty in obtaining answers to all such questions. (Hengel says that while crucifixions are frequently mentioned in the ancient literature, their manner is hardly ever described; in fact, the best description, according to him, is given in the Gospels [p. 25].) Here are some of the questions one would have liked to see answered, or at least discussed:

How widely was the "Greek cross" (X) applied in crucifixions? Did most of the Roman crosses carry their horizontal cross beam at the top of the vertical pole (T) or somewhat underneath it (†)? Were the people always crucified naked, or did they sometimes wear loincloths as the artists have regularly depicted Christ? How often were criminals crucified head-downward, a mode mentioned by Seneca (p. 25), and according to Origen applied to the apostle Peter (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.15.2)? How often were the genitals of the criminals nailed to the cross, a practice also mentioned by Seneca (p. 25)? How often was a small wooden peg (*sedecula*) attached to the upright pole on which the man to be executed sat? How long did crucified men usually live on the cross? Was it a general practice to crush the legs of crucified men if they were still alive at the end of the day of crucifixion, as the Gospels tell us the Roman soldiers did with the two criminals crucified together with Jesus?

Moreover, the author fails to take notice of discussions that have been going on about the way the feet were pierced by the nail (or nails) in crucifixions since the discovery of a skeleton of a crucified man in Jerusalem, although he does call attention to the articles containing these discussions (p. 32, n. 25; and in the Bibliography under V. Tzaferis and Y. Yadin, pp. 92, 93). He also fails to mention the fact that the nails were put through the lower arms, just above the wrists, and not through the palms of a condemned man, as experiments on corpses have shown: Pierced hands do not support a body hanging on them (A. F. Sava, M.D., in *CBQ*, 16 [1954]: 438-443), in contrast to most paintings of the crucified Christ. Also the arm bones of the Jerusalem skeleton reveal that the nails had pierced, not the man's hands, but his arms between the radius and ulna (N. Haas, in *IEJ* 20 [1970]: 58).

Another item of interest is the historical beginning and end of the practice of crucifixion. It may be difficult to come to unassailable results in this respect since the Greek words used for putting criminals to death are mostly ambiguous. It is not always easy to know which is meant—impaling or crucifixion. Ancient pictures of impaled men are known from Assyrian reliefs, but no early pictorial representations of crucified people have been found. This is a subject which needs a more thorough study than Hengel gives. If no evidence exists which can provide an answer as to the time in history when the practice of crucifixion was initiated, this fact should be

stated plainly. As far as the termination of crucifixion in history, the author indicates that the practice fell into disuse during the time of Constantine, when crucifixion was replaced by hanging (p. 29). But we know that crucifixions were carried out as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century in certain non-Christian countries of the Far East (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 5: 1134-1135). Therefore one would like to know whether this was a revival of a cruel ancient punishment, or whether the practice had never really died out completely.

One more criticism should be made. The bibliography is rather sketchy and misses some important works that deal with the subject of crucifixion. The author even fails to list several articles from which he presents quotations in the text, such as those of F. Cumont (p. 9, n. 20) and N. Haas (p. 32, n. 25).

The reader can see from this review that the small book of Hengel contains much that is commendable and helpful, but that it certainly does not exhaustively treat the subject of crucifixion in which every NT student should be interested.

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Hutchison, William R. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976. x + 347 pp. \$15.00.

Filling a major gap in the history of American theology, this volume argues that modernism was an apologetic movement within liberal Christianity that sought to break down the traditional distinction between religion and culture and emphasized modernity. To establish this thesis William R. Hutchison, who teaches American religious history at Harvard University, traces modernist thought from its Unitarian beginnings in the 1820s to its decline in the 1930s. The Unitarian quest for cultural sources of religious affirmation first pioneered the modernist synthesis during the four decades prior to the Civil War. Then in evangelicalism, Horace Bushnell and David Swing during the 1860s and 1870s revised doctrine within the context of modern thought. From this groundwork the "New Theologians"—Newman Smyth, Charles A. Briggs, and Theodore Munger—attempted in various ways to integrate science and theology. By the turn of the century, modernism was a discernible and influential movement that emphasized the immanence of God in the natural and cultural order while also seeking to preserve Christianity's uniqueness. Discussing this latter problem primarily within the context of mission, William Newton Clarke and George Angier Gordon argued that Christianity's singularity lay in its ethical superiority.

As the movement achieved influence, however, it experienced doubts regarding the validity of the idea of progress and the possibility of deriving theological data from modern culture. World War I only confirmed the questioning expressed by such people as George Burman Foster and William Wallace Fenn. While modernism was disintegrating internally, the 1920s brought attacks from fundamentalism and humanism, both of which argued that liberalism was not Christianity. By the end of the 1920s the term "modernism" had fallen into disuse; but liberalism, represented by Harry Emerson Fosdick, although unwilling to reinstate the distance between God and man urged by Karl Barth, no longer looked to human progress to explain God's nature. Hutchison concludes that adaptationism and the sense of divine immanence remain a vital theological heritage, though carried on more soberly by such theologians as Harvey Cox and Langdon Gilkey.

As this brief summary indicates, Hutchison has chosen a "history of ideas" methodology. Interested in the developing concept of modernity, he draws upon the formal thought of major figures as it appears in sermons, articles, books, and reviews.