

BOOK REVIEWS

Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary: Matthew 1-12*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987. xxx + 475 pp. \$24.95.

The Christbook grew out of Bruner's needs as a teacher of systematic theology in the Philippines. After some experimentation with different approaches to teaching systematics to third-world students, he found the gospel of Matthew to be the best vehicle. This commentary is the outgrowth of his experience.

The subtitle is to be taken seriously: the book is indeed *A Historical/Theological Commentary*. The historical/theological method (as contrasted to a historical/critical one) does not skip over the question of what the text *meant*, but it goes on from there to ask the further question: What does it *mean now*?

Hearing a commentary described as a theological commentary, and remembering that its beginnings lie in the attempt to teach systematic theology, one immediately thinks of Karl Barth's famous *Epistle to the Romans*. Barth's work is a rich meditation on the deeper theological meaning of Paul's letter to the Romans, but as a work of exegesis it is dissatisfying at times because the discussion of the actual meaning of the words of Paul is left somewhat in the background. Bruner makes reference to this danger, and he insists that a theological commentary must first pay close attention to the text. He has largely succeeded at this. The commentary does start with exegesis, and Bruner has clearly worked through many of the exegetical issues from the original text. But it moves beyond exegesis to look at some of the wider theological issues that are raised by the text. Briefly discussed are such things as the doctrine of Holy Scripture (pp. 13-17); the virgin birth (pp. 37-39); infant baptism (pp. 94-97); the relationship of faith and works (pp. 295-297), the nature of an adequate faith (p. 355); and the Sabbath (pp. 449-459), to mention just a few. Most of these arise fairly naturally from the text, although there are places where a reader with a background in more traditional exegesis will feel a certain discomfort with the addition of material which might be thought of as having a rather distant connection to the text at hand. Overall, however, the addition of this material from the wider perspectives of theological endeavor has an enriching effect. It brings things together which should not be kept apart—exegesis and theological reflection.

Since this work was published by Word Books, and written by an avowed evangelical (p. xxi), one would expect the commentary either to

avoid dealing with some of the more difficult issues in the exegesis of Matthew, or to reach predetermined answers, but such is not the case. Take, for example, the treatment of the genealogy of Jesus. While all the different explanations advanced on the subject of the genealogical problems are discussed, Bruner concludes that Matthew changed Asa to Asaph and Amon to Amos for theological reasons, and that Matthew probably just made a mistake in counting the third set of fourteen generations (there are only thirteen listed by Matthew). In Bruner's subsequent meditation on the doctrine of Holy Scripture, he suggests that Matthew did not possess mathematical inspiration. "I like Matthew's thirteen. I like it precisely because it 'de-magics' Scripture, humanizes, and normalizes it" (p. 15). This illustrates the great strengths of the book's methodology in approaching the task of systematic theology. While there are many who would debate with Bruner on the exegesis and the theological implications of this particular passage, as a systematic theologian he is very closely tying his systematic thought to the data of the Scripture itself. Problems are not casually brushed aside, but met honestly.

Many will find that another strength of the work is that it is closer to the needs of a preacher than most commentaries. The way that the wider theological issues and some contemporary issues are integrated into the text makes easier the task of enlivening the text of Matthew for a congregation. The commentary is also replete with telling phrases and practical applications.

In conclusion, while the commentary's methodology has some drawbacks (e.g., those rare occasions in which theological or practical connections are read into the text rather than out of it), Bruner has produced a unique product that should have usefulness and appeal to a wide range of readers. In purchasing the book, they receive a serviceable commentary together with the enriching of theological reflection and practical application. I await with interest the publication of *The Churchbook*, the second volume of the commentary, which will cover Matt 13-28.

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Evans, Louis H., Jr. *Hebrews*. The Communicator's Commentary, vol. 10. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985. 259 pp. \$16.95.

The principal aims of The Communicator's Commentary series are set forth by Lloyd Ogilvie in his editor's preface. He suggests that commentaries on the Bible tend to be either technical, with no application to daily life, or so popular that biblical roots are left unexplained. Thus,