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Let Each Gospel Speak for Itself

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of historical development through thesis, antithesis and synthesis is finally mentioned right on the last page of the book. This theory has been used by F.C. Baur and in Marxism, but it is funny to see it used in this argument to defend a conservative thesis about the priority of Matthew.

The authors' thesis raises several questions. Matthew had one birth story, Luke another. How is it that Mark edited these two by not having any birth story? Matthew had the Sermon on the Mount, Luke has the Sermon on the Plain. How is it that Mark edited these two by not having any sermon at all?

We now have editions of the three synoptic gospels which are line by line set up in parallel with each other. These parallels of the synoptic gospels show us literally hundreds of slight differences and similarities in the sentences and words in the gospels. Most books on the synoptic problem study literally hundreds of little variations. It seems odd to see a study of this issue which does not use this type of work. Did the authors go through such a parallel study? It is just such a study which suggests that Mark was first and that Matthew and Luke were doing independent changes. If the authors wish to debate this issue, they should go through literally hundreds of verses, but they have totally avoided this issue. Thus for a reader who has done even some work on the parallels in the gospels, this book is frustrating to read; at least it is frustrating for me. So the book is even hard to review. It is good to read the church fathers, but it is also good to read the gospels.

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Let Each Gospel Speak for Itself

R. Rhys Williams

Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987

Williams is a retired Episcopal priest with forty years of pastoral experience, a Professor Emeritus of Marist College, Poughkeepsie, New York, where he taught for seventeen years. He now lives in Nova Scotia.

The title of the book adequately describes its content and purpose. This is "not another explanation of the meaning of the gospels, but an introduction to a different method of studying the gospels." Williams is committed to the redaction-critical approach which focuses more on the differences than on the similarities between the various gospel accounts. The approach is one which "takes the creative function of the gospel writer seriously." The author acknowledges that "such an approach is not new." He contends, however, that "this approach has not had much impact on the average, serious student of the New Testament or on the parish clergy." This situation William wishes to remedy.

To demonstrate what deeper insights into the meaning of the biblical text can be gained by employing redaction-critical methodology, Williams takes the reader through major sections of the gospel accounts. He devotes one chapter each to the Christmas stories, the Easter narratives, and the Good Friday cycle of pericopes, and he summarizes the findings in a concluding chapter.

To catch the deeper intention of each gospel writer, one must first of all pay careful attention to the context in which each evangelist places a given pericope or cycle of pericopes. For example, it is of very great significance that in Mark the passion narrative appears in the context of the "Little Apocalypse" (Mark 13). This sets the tone for the entire gospel. "Mark's gospel is an eschatological proclamation of the coming again of the risen Christ" (65).

In his examination of parallel passages Williams points out many fine details which the casual reader might regard as negligible and as of no practical consequence for the understanding of the story. Such details are by no means insignificant, the author contends. They affect the tenor and impact of the entire gospel in a fundamental way.

Each gospel was composed for the benefit of a particular faith community. Careful attention to the unique emphases of each gospel writer will therefore allow us to gain a better understanding of the situation with which that faith community had to wrestle. This, in turn, can help the interpreter identify the kind of issues to which that particular gospel speaks most eloquently.

For those who wish to employ redaction-critical methodology in their own ministry, Williams offers a simple procedure involving three steps (69).

1. Outline the structure of the gospel.
2. Identify the dominant themes of the gospel.
3. Distinguish the work of the evangelist from the sources he used.

This is an excellent little book, but it suffers from several weaknesses. The book abounds in simple thetic statements, unsupported by relevant data or deductive argumentation. Frequently, the author simply affirms that such and such is so. To those who are familiar with the method and the approach, such statements may present little difficulty, but if, as the author explains in his introduction, the book is addressed to persons for whom this approach is new, such readers will be left with many unanswered questions, skeptical about the validity of the approach, and suspicious of its conclusions.

For this reason, the book is not to be recommended as a first introduction to the subject. It assumes too much on the part of uninitiated readers. Such persons will probably be left unconvinced, or will even be alienated by the many unsupported and potentially shocking assertions. For those, on the other hand, who have taken a course in New Testament Introduction, and who already have a good deal of familiarity with redaction-critical methodology, although during their seminary days the significance of redaction-critical studies may have eluded them, the book is a helpful

summary, an excellent refresher course, and a stimulating invitation to put the method into practice and to "let each gospel speak for itself."

Editors should know that German nouns are always capitalized (*Sitz im Leben, Redaktionsgeschichte*).

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The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate 1987

Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1988

vi + 71 pp. \$8.50

As Appendices 3 and 4 and the Bibliography of this little volume make clear, Anglican-Lutheran dialogues have been going on for two decades in places as diverse as Tanzania, Malaysia, India (between Lutherans and the Church of South India), Australia, Europe, the U.S.A., and Canada, with results ranging from agreed statements on doctrine to joint eucharistic celebrations. With *episcopē* remaining as "the chief obstacle to full communion" (5), the Consultation on which this document reports was convened at Niagara Falls in the fall of 1987. The report notes (ch. 3) how much the two communions have in common (including scriptures, creeds, sacraments, similar orders of worship) and that they have neither "officially engaged in any divisive theological or doctrinal controversy" nor "officially condemned each other as Churches" (34).

Rather than restricting apostolic succession to "an unbroken chain of ordinations from the apostles' time" (8), as has often been done but is here labelled a "mistake" (8), the Consultation includes in apostolicity "characteristics of the whole Church" (14) such as mission, doxology, faithfulness and continuity, disciplined communal life, nurture, and structure (ch. 2), concluding that in view of their "commonly held apostolic faith" neither church "can, in good conscience, reject the apostolic nature of the other" and that "the ordained ministry is no longer an issue which need divide" them (33). The "continued isolation" of those who exercise *episcopē* in the two churches is therefore "no longer tolerable and must be overcome" (33).

To this end, however, both churches are asked to make certain changes. Lutherans are asked 1) to designate as bishop or suffragan bishop all "who exercise an ordained ministry of *episcopate* (41); 2) to elect bishops "to the same tenure of office as are congregational pastors, chaplains, and other pastoral ministers in the Church," i.e. until "death, retirement, or resignation" (42); 3) in accord with the canons of Nicaea, to revise the rites of installation of bishops "so that there is a laying on of hands by at least three bishops" (thus giving liturgical expression to the church's recognition "that